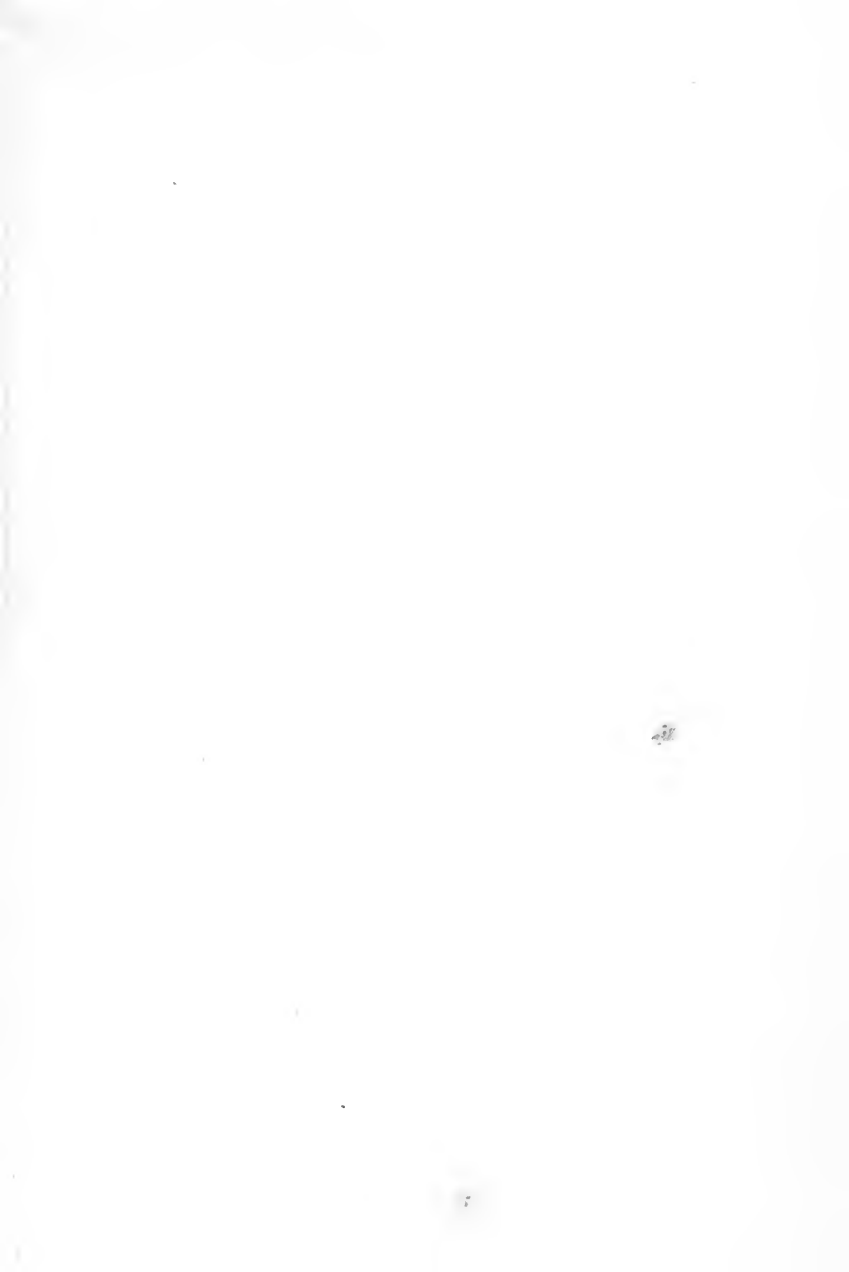


JIM HANDS

RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD



THE MACMILLAN COMPANY



British Empire

John Edward Burton

JIM HANDS



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KATHERINE

JIM HANDS

BY

RICHARD WASHBURN CHILD

FRONTISPIECE BY J. A. WILLIAMS

New York

THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1911

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Set up and electrotyped. Published November, 1910. Reprinted
January, 1911.

Norwood Press
J. S. Cushing Co. — Berwick & Smith Co.
Norwood, Mass., U.S.A.

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CHAPTER I

OUTSIDE the cottage, somewhere behind the purple veil of evening, sounded the voice of some woman, softly singing as if to one unborn. A joyful girl had opened sensitive lips to a snatch of a crooning Irish lullaby.

Jim Hands, engaged in the important task of packing his pipe, stopped to raise his gray head. The light from the western sky, still lingering in the room like something the day, with its stir and toil, had left behind, disclosed the strange, faint smile upon his face.

He turned his rocking-chair toward the window. "You heard her," he said. "There are sounds that take a feller back — " He stopped. The clock on the wall, taking advantage of the moment of silence, asserted its sense of duty by a solemn ticking. The foreman of the upper leather room spoke again. "It's a mystery — " Again he stopped, and bracing against the chair-arms with his calloused hands, he rose. He went to the window. He looked down at the town.

"Come here," he said. "Look at the lights in them windows. Them lights mean people. Do you know

that? Look at that town. A town ain't just a town. It's got a soul. The girl's voice you heard — But ain't people interesting? Look at that town!"

There it was, winking its eyes in the dusk. To it a railroad winds up the valley through woods that are brightest green in spring and brilliant with color in the fall. Those who go back and forth on the trains must notice that it is only the pines that are eternally black against the cold, moonlit sky of winter and against the fire of the summer sunsets. Across a snow-covered bridge comes the railroad, and curves through the factory village like a live and sinuous creature bound for the hazy blue mountains at the end of the valley. But the river has been up there. It is coming back now. It loafs in the meadows. It rushes through the muddy town. It cuts Main Street in two where the bridge stands; it sings a hearty tune at night over the flashboards of the dams; its ice booms with the bitter cold of the winter; clouds of gnats hover over its industry-stained waters in August; on one side, in the bending alders, the catbird squawks; on the other bank the belting in the red shoe factory complains.

The factory squats on the bank like a creature too. Its windows are eyes. They keep watch over the town. They see the flag raised on the old New England liberty pole at the end of the green common; they see farms on the half-distant hillsides — red and white with rock-filled pastures and winding white roads edged

with the yellow of goldenrod. They see wisps of wood smoke from the chimneys at supper-time.

The factory windows see the lighted face of the clock on the "Opera House." They see the few old mansions between the elms at one end of the village; they see a hundred modern wooden cottages and boarding-houses where live the workmen in the factories. They see the farm wagons go by with the old type on the seats. They see the barber-shop across the river next to the Phenix Hotel with the new type in its chairs.

The factory sees that some sort of a new civilization is replacing some sort of an old civilization. It sees, in the break of buildings between the First National Bank and Masonic Hall on Main Street, the movement of pay-day night, when the store windows are bright and the screen-doors slam behind well-dressed wives of well-clothed factory workmen. It sees the modern hats of girls, gayly trimmed, mingling with the sombre bonnets of women who are in from the country.

Before its doors, in the right weather, when the heat-waves rise from the gravel road, wagons pass laden with hay, leaving behind them the smell of fields to mingle with the odors of machine grease and sole leather and thread wax. And at the factory door one can listen to the turbine rolling and nevertheless hear also the splash of a pickerel in the river.

Like the factory windows, the windows of Jim Hands' cottage see all below and all up the valley, where, on

moonlight evenings in autumn the river mists, so it seems, sway out of their hollows toward the mountains. Jim surveyed it all with his hands upon the ledge. The fading light showed the homely front room of his house; especially it exhibited the family photographs perching upon the mantel over the stove, the stove which had fought many a gallant battle with the crisp cold that comes down over the Canadian border. The last rays fell across the foreman's own face.

When one works on a cutting-bench and turns a knife about the sharpest corner on the pattern, it is necessary to screw up the features, no matter how imperceptibly, as if to warn the hand against a slip. After years and years that screwing up of the corners of the mouth and eyes makes its irreparable mark, as millions of feet will wear out the marble steps of the court-house. Jim has the significant wrinkles. He, like his front room, is homely. And yet there is in his face that which awakens in other men a warm and pleasant feeling. It could only belong to an American, in spite of all its traces of foreign blood. There are qualities in it which call to mind those sombre portraits of old citizens, sea-captains, perhaps, or farmers, or presidents of ancient institutions, which are found in musty albums or mildewed in rickety picture-frames. They looked like men who had wrestled with something and won a victory of some kind. Somehow it seemed as if their lives and their accom-

plishments and the lines in their faces had grown out of one soil. The clothes they wore did not conceal the significance of the national traits common to all these faces. Nor do the soft shirt and drooping coat and nose-reddening spectacles of Jim Hands conceal his right to belong to the brotherhood of that virtuous endeavor which has in it something typical of America. His features are, indeed, homely. They are patient, kind, and strong.

Had some old ballad-maker strolled out of the past as Jim stood there with his hands on the window-ledge and his face reflecting the sunset, he might have said, "Let me sing of the army of the nameless, — the drudging clerks, the obscure family doctors, the fameless judges of probate, the toilers in the factories, and men like these in many callings, — who labor cheerfully in shadows, in their homes are patient, and outside are just, and maintain, though it be not true, that every woman is good."

The rattle of a dish in the kitchen behind the closed door ended Jim's reflective mood. He lit his pipe. He went back to the rocking-chair. "Annie," said he, speaking of his wife, "will soon have the dishes done. Little John has been helping her wipe 'em since he come back from his school, and the only reason I know it is that I've been missing so much of the crockery." He grunted between each puff of his pipe. "It's dark here now — do you want a lamp lit? Some

people must always sit in a glare of light. They're the same kind that like red wall-paper. Trying to have things cheerful. As if cheerfulness could be hung at so much a roll or drawn through the gas-pipe into a city flat. Of course, if you want a light, — it's no bother, — just say so. I — ”

Again the girl's voice, humming a snatch of tune, silenced him. There were steps on the gravel, and between the two trees that stood one on either side of the path from the gate to the door a flick of moving white showed in the haze of the night, as if some half-real creature of the forest had come out to dance over the fields down the lights of the factory town.

Jim's rocking-chair creaked as if the muscles of his body were reflecting some emotion. He did not move as the front door was softly opened and shut, nor as a light step moved toward the second door which separated the living-room from the hall — that hall where the children's hats hung and rubber shoes stood in a row upon the floor. The door was pushed open quietly, but the darkness prevented any one within from seeing who stood framed there.

Then, suddenly, Jim struck a match. The circle of light expanded; it seemed to reach out across the rose-patterned carpet; it touched the hem of a woman's gown; it leaped upward to the woman's face. Eyes as clear as mountain pools, and the color of reflected autumn foliage, momentarily half dazed by the sudden

light, looked from the doorway, as if trying to determine whether Jim Hands sat alone.

She had the rich, half-red, half-brown mass of hair which so often is seen as a peculiar beauty conferred upon women with cold, white, transparent skins and small stature. In this girl, however, the luxury of color and mass crowned a figure which was tall, erect, pliant, and poised as only healthy bodies can be, with the suggestion of easy muscular action unhampered by too much weight. And the flesh of her hands, her face, and neck was of that warm color that suggests, like a field of ripening grain, the open air and sunlight. Upon her face a look of doubt and a smile of greeting, both in being at one moment, indicated the adaptability of her features to express her emotions; her beauty was the beauty of a woman who has had enough of living to enrich these emotions, not too much to dull them or to take the light and vivacity from a girlish face.

That a woman's attractions compel observation before any peculiarity of her dress is an unusual tribute to her personality; this girl, one could see, not at the first, but only at the second, glance, was not dressed as a member of a workman's family. There was no elaboration of her gown; it was simple drapery of a light and flowing material that spoke in some unknown way of its own elegance. It was of that buff color sometimes seen in orchids; with it she wore a

single ornament — a malachite pin that held together the folds of the gown at the point where her neck was bare. The green of this pin revealed by the flare of the burning match made a well-balanced harmony between the color of the material and the warm and delicate flesh tints. For the moment, neither her fresh beauty, her bearing, nor her clothes seemed a part of Jim Hands' household. The picture was as surprising as would be the sudden appearance of a mermaid in a public fountain.

She gave a little exclamation of surprise. The match went out. She had only stood there a moment. Like an image of the fancy she had gone. Only the sound of a soft, retreating step in the hall remained, and in the room, dark once more, Jim's pipe-bowl, topped by a disk of glowing red, was the only discernible object. He was drawing upon it with measured, deliberate inhalations.

"That was her," he said. "She's a beauty. But she don't know it now. You think so, don't you? At twelve she was all elbows and knees, and tripping over anything that weren't sandpapered down to a dead level, and loose-moving like this month's colt or a hound puppy, and had a voice that would kinder make a tin pan ashamed to look you in the face. She's changed. I oughter know; I've seen her for twenty-four years, and her youngster is two years old now — fat and healthy as an exhibit at a county fair.

“Ain’t it funny where people come from and where they get to and where they’re going? Ain’t it funny how people — even women — can aim at something and get there by and by Ain’t it strange about her? Why, that’s my girl — that’s Katherine — my daughter. I’ll tell you about her. I’ll tell *you*.”

CHAPTER II

CHILDREN is a terrible investment. Of course they're much riskier for rich folks than for people like my Annie and me. Rich families don't have the time to give to raising 'em, being altogether too busy trying to fill in moments of idleness. And while I'm speaking of Katherine I might as well say that children is like caterpillars. My little Mike's school-teacher gave him a lot of 'em and told him to raise 'em to butterflies. That is the training the youngsters get in these days to prepare 'em for a world filled with newspapers advertising gold-mines. Anyhow, some of these caterpillars were soft and furry and pretty as anything you ever saw, and others of 'em were that ugly that just looking at 'em would make you feel like a morning at the dentist's. But you couldn't tell how they was going to come out. The homeliest of 'em hatched into little flying-machines, so pretty that they would embarrass a lot of Christmas-tree ornaments.

That was the way with my youngsters. Little John was a baby then, so ugly that the neighbors hated to look at him and hear my Annie tell how pretty he was, and Michael was always in a dream, and kinder stupid acting, though I've learned since he was thinking out

for himself what most boys have to learn by conversation. And there was Katherine — just as I said — awkward and falling over chairs, and thin and flat-chested, and when she'd stand up she'd stoop in two places so she looked like the letter S.

I loved 'em. And I said nothing to my Annie, but I remember I sometimes would watch 'em going down Maple Street to school and say, "Jim, your posterity will leave some queer impressions about the old man."

My Annie herself began to worry about Katherine. Have you noticed that there are two mother instincts? The second one comes when a daughter begins to stop being a little girl and the time for her mating has come. I've seen mothers act like tigers then. They put on war-paint and other aristocracy, and make dresses for the girl till their fingers is all stained with the brass thimble, and look at every young man as if he was a burglar, and every day they fight to see that if any match is made it will be a good one, and every night they lie on the pillow, looking up at the moonlight on the ceiling, and plan so hard they have to turn down another blanket. And Annie began to see that something would have to be done about the girl.

"Jim," she says to me, "I think Katherine oughter have some accomplishments," she says. "She'll soon be a woman — before we realize it," she says. "She's sevēnteen now."

"And plays on the pianner," says I.

“Yes, dear, she does,” says she; “but she has to stop and go back so much that it sounds the way writing looks on tissue paper when you go back and try to rub out every other word.”

“Well,” says I, “what accomplishments do you want her to have?” I says. “Name ’em,” I says.

“’Tis very hard to name accomplishments,” says my Annie, smoothing down her dress. “They’re the things a girl can do in company who don’t chew gum,” she says. “Maybe it’s manners I have in mind,” she says. “I believe the girl will have to go to a convent,” she says, “for a year or so,” she says.

It was them words that started the whole story. It was them words that took the girl away from us, and it was them words that taught me the great lesson that too much peace and prosperity is a terrible affliction upon defenceless human beings.

You take it from me, prosperity is an awful fix. The happiest part of a man’s life is when he ain’t. If anybody comes along and offers to give you a hundred thousand dollars, tell him to go bet it on the races. Don’t get along so fast that you can’t enjoy it.

It’s a fact. The best fun in life is being young, healthy, married, and poor! You know my Annie — the best ever. Sense and grit in car-load lots, freight paid — that’s her! Twenty-one years I’d been married to her. It had been a circus, ups and downs and all arounds. Once, when I was working on the laster’s

bench, we had to use overcoats for blankets, and it was a choice sometimes whether we'd have hot water or cold for lunch. We grinned, though, — she and me, — we grinned together. She was always singing and healthy and bothering with the kids' clothes or hair or "Thank you, ma'am," and right to-day she's as straight and thin and pink as the day I married her. I believe health is just having no time to be sick. And maybe it helps out a little to have the kitchen boiler burst once in a while in winter, and a rat die in the walls sometime during the summer, — for health!

But, as I was saying, this time I speak of began four years ago come this October. "We've got to send the girl to the convent," says Annie to me. "She's been learned all they can learn her at the high school, which ain't much, or the teacher in the third grade wouldn't wear them hair puffs."

"Who'll play the pianner so poor when she's gone," says I, ugly at the thought of it. "And we just bought it — made of rosewood, too, that is twice the sweeter toned than them black ones."

"You might as well say a red automobile goes faster than a green one," says she.

"Well, I don't pertend to know nothing of musical instruments," says I, "but I do pertend to know that the girl sets on the arm of my chair when I read evenings, and it's worth eight dollars a sit."

"She oughter go," says Annie; — confidential, I'll

tell you that she's the boss of the house, though you must say nothing about it;—"We have the money to send her," she says, "and Jim, dear, our boy Mike will be away this winter, too, and little John, as you know, is with his aunt Maria."

"And you might as well have no children!" says I, "with every one of 'em away forgetting whether I wear a mustache or a beard."

She looks at me with the devil in her eyes, and she says, says she, "'Tis very sudden you get so tender and sentimental," she says. "Only yesterday you was laying plans to put little John over your knee for smoking coffee in your favorite pipe, and you was going to disown Michael altogether for buying a pair of red and black striped socks, and you told your darling daughter that the next time she leaned over the fence to talk with that silly Bolton boy, you'd go and take a room at the hotel, where you didn't have to listen to such foolishness."

"Oh," says I, "'tis all right. I suppose you'll have it all arranged now. Who am I to oppose you?"

"Jim, dear," she says, coming and sitting beside me on the door-step. "You'll not misunderstand, dear, will you? But I just want to tell you that for nearly eighteen years—ever since the daughter came—there hasn't been a minute that I haven't been a wife and mother. It makes me laugh when I think of the number of cakes of soap, safety pins, and hand-

fuls of baking-soda have gone through these two hands of mine. And I suppose that the idea of the house being free and clear of it all for the winter seems good to me because I'm tired, maybe, and now we're in good circumstances, Jim, I just thought I'd like to have — ”

And there she stopped, so I says to her, “What is it, Annie? ”

“Well,” she says, plucking at her apron, “I don't know what you'll think of me, but I'll just be glad for the children to be away now that it's for their good to go. I'd be glad to have nothing to do. I'd be glad to have a little idleness, dear.”

“God save you,” says I, with half a lot of trouble not to have my eyes wet. “You've earned it sixty ways. You want nothing to do, and I'll give it to you. We'll have a peaceful winter!” says I, and with that she presses my hand as if she was still a young thing sitting out with me on a park bench.

And she says over after me, “A peaceful winter,” and it's terrible to think of them words!

I'm not speaking of the wrench it gave us to get rid of the children. That was bad enough. I remember the day came for Katherine to go. All the arrangements had been made, and Annie was saying that this dress was in the tray of the trunk, and the heaviest underclothing had all been marked with her name. I guess there weren't any of us — Annie, the girl, or me — that knew what it was going to be to say good-by.

It is only at them times that you get them wonderful forewarnings of railroad accidents and disease and awful dangers that don't happen and that women call their intuition, if I have the word correct.

We got down to the station all right. It was about four o'clock, and the finest day you ever saw. A good many people knew the girl was going away, and there was a lot of talk about it, and I was proud that I could send her. I was feeling fine and in good spirits. And then the engine whistled and the old station-master, Harry Batchelder, dragged the baggage truck out on to the edge of the platform, and I seen my girl's new trunk on it, and it almost turned me sick.

"Annie," I whispers, grabbing my wife's arm, "Katherine is going away!" I says.

"Of course she is," says Annie, laughing at me. "What did you buy a ticket for?" says she. "Did you think you'd get one with a lucky number?" says she. "What's the matter with your hand? Have you got a chill?" she says. "Don't show your silly feelings to all these folks," she says. "Watch me, and learn how to control yourself," she says.

By that time the train had come in. It was all over in a minute. Katherine had climbed up on the back platform. The train was going out. It all went like a moving picture running too fast. And then Annie caught at my coat and began to cry. Somehow it didn't seem wrong.

But I was watching that girl on the platform waving to us. She didn't look the same. All at once she seemed to be ready to come out of herself into something new. I seen for the first time that she weren't awkward. I seen she was almost pretty. I seen how thick her hair had grown. I seen her figure had filled out. I seen she was almost a woman. And I was scared, for I couldn't just see what she would become any more than I could tell about little Mike's caterpillars. And I was scared. I never guessed what them months would do.

CHAPTER III

WE had some experience right at home. I ain't saying that things didn't go right at first, you understand. Of course, it was surprising how large the house got. I didn't know I'd bought anything but a cheap cottage, but when the children was gone, every room seemed as big as an opera hall, and there weren't any rubbers on the floor under the stairs, nor new digs in the wall-paper at the landing, and the books on the parlor table was piled so neat, I got mad and turned 'em upside down so's the biggest ones would sit on the top, and when the mice would come out for crumbs after dinner when I was reading my paper, I could hear 'em very plain. It sounded as if they wore wooden shoes.

Annie would sit on the other side of the table evenings and sew, and we talked to each other for a month, and then began all over again, saying just what we'd said before, and after a month had gone by we'd told each other everything we knew, and some extras. The wind would holler outside, and maybe Annie would say it smelled like snow that night, and then a fly that had been warmed by the round stove would buzz into the corners where it was dark, and I could hear the

water drip from the faucet in the kitchen sink, and I kinder missed Annie's step upstairs when she would walk around over my head, putting little John to bed.

"This quiet is a great blessing to us both, Jim, ain't it?" says she, studying to see how I'd answer.

"It's more monotonous than a lot of noise," says I to myself; and to her I says, "What do you think about when I'm at the factory?" says I.

"Why, I don't know, Jim," says she. "There used to be so much to plan when we was scraping along. I'd plan then of how we'd be able to buy a pianner for the daughter, and what we'd plant around the maple tree if we owned the house, and whether I'd get gray blankets that don't look so swell and put white spreads over 'em, or white blankets that cost more and don't need no spread for the likes of us. But I don't have to plan like that any more. It's a perfect rest," says she. "I don't have to think of nothing. And if it weren't for a pain I have here," she says, putting her hand under her arm, "that worries me," she says, "I'd be contented, I suppose."

"A pain!" says I. "Worries you!"

"Yes," she says. "I've had a mind to go see Dr. Ward. I've not been to a doctor these eight years. Many's the time I feel bad and say nothing to you, Jim. And yesterday I was looking in the mirror, and I believe I've got something growing in my throat."

I drops my newspaper on the floor and was scared,

till I remembered how healthy she'd always been. But there weren't two weeks gone when something worse began to happen. I remember how I come home one day from work and I seen her sitting in the parlor winder; but she didn't come to meet me at the door, and when I walks in she was still sitting looking out over the hills.

"You've got bad news," I says, with my lungs laying down in my stomach for freight.

"Oh, no," says she. "I'm just tired out. If it weren't wicked, I'd wish I was dead. Every day is just like another. It seems as if I was no good any more — no good to any one," she says. "There's the fourth letter from our girl. It depressed me to read it," she says.

I thought maybe something was wrong with Katherine, so I picked the envelope off the mantelpiece and hardly dared to start it.

"It's good, firm, stylish handwriting," I says. "I think I see an improvement in them o's and capital W's," I says. "What's this? Getting along fine? Rising early in the morning for prayers. Sister Maria says she has a bending toward the French language. All the other girls think her dresses is pretty. Fine view from her window over the St. Lawrence River. Complexion much better. Why," says I, "what have you to complain of? There ain't any member of my family could write as graceful as that and cut them

literary figure eights," I says, "or report better news," I says.

"O dear!" says she, shaking her head very sad. "She has outgrown her mother," she says. "I'm no more use to her."

"You're crazy," says I. "Annie, girl, there ain't anything the matter?"

With that I seen her look up at me with a flash in her eyes I ain't seen since I quit drinking. "Oh, that's like you," she says, throwing up her hands. "I never thought it would come to this. You've as good as called me a liar."

"No, I ain't, Annie," I says. "I was only going to say —"

"I know what you was going to say," she comes back at me before I could finish. "You was going to say that I showed signs of growing old."

"What the hell!" says I.

With that she jumped up. "Jim Hands," says she, hot and shrill, "you've sworn at me! You've cursed your wife!"

"Annie," says I, "I'm sorry. I never —"

"Don't expect me to forgive it," says she. "You have no shame," says she, "to stand up there and admit it. But it's like you. I thought it would come out some day. It's your brutal nature," she says.

"Look here," says I, — for by that time an angel in heaven'd be looking for a brickbat, — "what do

you think you are? You behave yourself, or I'll give you something that'll surprise you."

"Not me!" she says, says she. It was at the door she was standing, and she says, "You weren't ever fitted to have a wife. Don't expect me to care what you do," says she, and went up the stairs; and I heard the key turn in the bedroom lock.

I was hot. I sticks on my hat again and out I went. You know how a feller feels. Starts off to walk a thousand miles and never come back! It had just come on to rain, — one of them cold December rains, — and I hadn't gone half a mile before I began to feel bad about it. We'd never in eighteen years passed hot words before. I knew well enough it weren't my fault, but yet I suspected it was. I might have done this or said that, see? I was a big fool to turn back. Once started, I oughter have done something to scare her. But you know how it is, being a man. It's for them weaknesses women gets the best of us — and it's better so, maybe.

As I say, I went back with feet so soaked that every time I lifted 'em they sounded like bottles of cough syrup, and there was the front door standing open and my Annie in it, caring nothing for the wet or wind; and when she seen me she give a little scream and says, "Oh, Jim, Jim, I thought you might be dead. Come right into the kitchen till I get you a dry pair of socks. Oh, Jim, I've been such a fool."

It was true, of course, more ways than one. For standing in the doorway that night she'd caught a cold that kept her hacking and tossing at night for the next three weeks, and after a month was gone she did look kinder bad. I was scared. I never knew what struck her. I couldn't tell what was the matter.

She had forty different pains. Never sang no more, and was cross. And somebody lent her a book called "Every Man his Own Doctor," with a list of symptoms in the book. And that made things seventy times worse, and maybe eighty.

"Jim, dear," she says, "I feel all tired out, and I can scarce move. This growth in my throat, too. Will you look in and see what you can see? Whenever it comes on to snow, like it did to-day, it's worse, I think. It may be a cancer — read there in the book just above where your thumb is now. I'll hold the lamp, dear, and you look down my throat," she says.

I couldn't see nothing, and the next day when I went off in the morning she was about as happy as a pan of wet coal ashes. "Another weary day," says she, "and I feel so bad, Jim! I stayed awake all night, thinking. I wondered if I was ever able to do my duty again. I wondered if you loved me!"

"G'wan," says I, "what talk is this from a woman who has a good husband who don't drink, and three fine children, all healthy, and a house of her own, and the respect of everybody in town — even the boss's wife!"

"I know, dear," she says, "but I've been wondering what I would do if Applegate's store didn't have them preserves I used to buy there last winter. It just made me cry, and my memory's gone, and two nights running I dreamed I was going to die. And, Jim, dear, I have a feeling that it will come true!"

Then I was scared. I knew for three months there'd been trouble. That was sure. It stuck out and smoked like the fuse on a big cannon cracker. Thunder was going to pop! But I didn't know what the trouble was, so I went off hot-foot for Dr. Ward.

You know him — Charlie Ward. His father's a farmer up in Goldenville, just above here. You wouldn't believe it to see Charlie. He don't even look as if he came from a muddy, manufacturing, water-power town like this. And he's a fine doctor, they tell me; only he says that horse-chestnuts carried in the pocket won't keep out rheumatism, and so he's lost customers on that account.

He said to me he thought it wiser to see Annie at home than in his office on Main Street; and, of course, it was lots wiser for him — a dollar and a half wiser each time. So he came in that night, scenting up the room with that doctor smell, and rubbing his chin as if the seat of thought was in his jaws, and stepping soft and speaking quiet as if he was an advance agent for a cremation company.

"How long have you had this little cough?"

"Three weeks," says Annie.

"H'm! H'm!" says he, like that — as if he'd have us know he was thinking, but none of our business what he thought.

"Don't forget," says I, "to tell him of your ache under your arm, and how your hair comes out, and the shooting pain across the back of your neck, and the dizzy spells, and how your heart slips under the belting, and you can't sleep, and you're all tired out," I says.

"H'm! H'm!" says he, and he takes a picture of Father Ryan off the mantelpiece and looks at the front of it and at the back of it, and he says, "Have you had any fever afternoons?"

"I believe I have," says she, "now that you speak of it."

"H'm! H'm!" says he. "You'd best come to the office to-morrow, and we'll make an examination," he says, squinting one eye. "We oughter know just what's the matter, hadn't we?" he says — for all them doctors talk to you like plumbers, as if you didn't know but little about the mysteries of leaks and clogged pipes, and oughter be horsewhipped for knowing that.

Well, sir, if you ever see a hen sitting on the safety valve of a eighty-ton boiler when she blew off pressure, you've seen how I felt after I talked to the doctor that next Thursday.

The big fool put his hand on my shoulder! That

was enough. I knew he was going to pass me a package, all right. He meant well. He'd seen it done in a play, I guess. But it scared me before he'd said a word.

"And," he says, "Jim," he says, "I'm afraid your wife is in bad condition," he says. "She must have a complete rest," he says. "She mustn't do any housework of any kind," he says, "not so much as wipe a dish."

"What's the matter with her?" I says.

"It's a combination of things," says he.

"What's its name?" I says.

He never answers. But he says, "There is some suspicious symptoms that points toward a tendency to tuberculosis," he says, "and a sign of impoverished circulation," he says, "with attendant melancholia," he says. "Complete rest and care may prevent anything serious," he says, for I remember them words by the fright they give me.

"And," he says, "I've told your wife about what to do," he says, "and she is going to send for her mother, Mrs. Byrnes, I believe. So you can get along, Jim, with her to do the cooking, and it's lucky the children is all away."

"Have you ever et any of Mrs. Byrnes's bread?" says I, still solemn; and with that I went out of the office.

But it turned out that way — the old lady came up. You've never seen her. She's fat, and puffs when she walks. 'Tis a great secret with her that she can't

read or write, and she's from the old country, as she says, though many years ago. Annie takes after her father, who was a granite worker with an arm like a piece of braided steel hawser — thin and tough — and a back that looked as if it was stuffed with English walnuts. But the old lady is a great old party, though she's got no learning. She ain't short on experience, and many's the time I heard her say, "A hound's nose is sharper than the school-teacher's." And she's got a brogue as thick as it is long, and ain't never satisfied with life till she's made the house no place to live in by boiling pickles on the stove.

CHAPTER IV

I WELL remember the night I met her at the station, when the seven-eighteen come coughing up the grade. It's a cold country — this — in winter, and sleighing lasts from Thanksgiving till you wonder why it don't get tired staying. And the old lady got down from the train with about forty thousand boxes, and things done up in straps, and a tin lard-pail, and a jar of pickles with the paper off, so she looked like somebody who'd looted a ship's steerage. And her breath was showing on the cold air — puff — puff — puff — like a derrick engine lifting a big block of granite.

“God bless ye, Jimmy, bye,” she says to me just like that. “I took much pleasure reading your letter about Annie's sickness.”

“I didn't write it,” says I. “Annie did.”

“I don't doubt ye,” says she, “for my eyes is getting bad. And what ails the poor darling?” she says. “Have they put a name to it yet?” she says.

“No,” says I, picking up her stuff for her.

“Oh, well,” says she, “if it ain't one of them old standard disayses,” she says, “ye have little to fear, bar the medicine,” she says, and winks at me with one of her old eyes. “I'll cook ye one of them pancakes.

Ye was after being fond of them in yer courting days," she says.

That was the kind she was, cheerful all the time, and making bread with bullets of baking-soda peppered through it to surprise your taste. But when she come, Annie seemed to give up. She got so she would hardly dress to come down to her meals, and dinner over, she'd give a sigh and go off to her room again. It most drove me crazy. She who'd been that healthy and happy, and now thinking of death, and I tell you there was times when I was at work I didn't know whether I was in the factory cutting-room, or sitting thinking in the arm-chair at home — the arm-chair we bought out of the back of a magazine.

I guess it was a week had gone when I come home one night, and I remember it was the day the trap in the penstock busted and filled the turbine full of ice and shut us down. I stayed with the boss and the engineer, blocking her up so she wouldn't freeze if it come up cold, and I was late home. I remember I stopped at the top of the hill there and looked down into the village with the light in the town-hall clock and all them little lights, and I began to think that a feller climbs to the top of happiness and maybe goes too fast and slides down on the other side.

And when I got in, Annie weren't there, and I found her mother cleaning up in the kitchen. I better say that there's one thing Annie gets from the old woman,

and that's a set on her jaw when she's mad. And I could see it on the mother's face right then — sticking out like a balcony on a building.

“Where's Annie?” says I.

“Whist, there,” says she, holding up a bottle. “Make no noise, Jim. I'm pouring the doctor's medicine into a rat-hole, for it has the odor for their sorrow, me bye.”

“What's this?” says I, for I saw the row there'd be over her crazy tricks.

“Be still, I tell ye,” says she. “I want a talk wid ye in private,” she says. “For what is it the doctor says? I've dognosed her case,” says she.

“Sit there by the stove,” says she, “and I'll learn ye something,” she says. “I know what's the matter wid the girl,” she says, “if my wits ain't broke wid my years. Did ye ever see wan of these rich women with no children and nothing to do?” she says.

“I have,” says I. “The boss's oldest daughter, who's married to a broker in New York, is one of them.”

“Don't be interrupting me,” says she. “Ye know nothing about it, and I do. I was out in service till I married Jawn, and I seen more than many of them. And I tell ye that poor women is lucky not to be rich — for it's a dread disayse to be a rich lady without children.”

“What's that to do with Annie?” says I.

“She's wan av them!” says she, pressing with her hands on her fat hips and squeezing out a sigh.

"She has three good children," says I.

"They've gone away," she says, "and this rest the doctor talks about is the cause av the evil. Perfect peace, Jim, me bye, is perfect hell."

"And what makes you think it of her?" I says.

"'Tis quick told," she says. "She has three notions, and these is them: she thinks nobody loves her any more, and she thinks she's sick, and she thinks she'll see what happens if she raises the devil."

"Not Annie!" says I, getting mad.

"G'wan," says she. "You'd be worse than her if ye had to be here at home all day. An angel would be worse than the rest of us in the same fix, for there'd be a complaint about the feathers falling out av the wings."

"What can we do?" says I, scratching my head.

She walks over to me, mysterious, and pokes my vest with one of her fat fingers. "Sure, Jim," says she, "we must take this perfect peace and knock spots outer it," says she.

"We must give her something real to worry about," she says. "We must take all this peace and prosperity and wipe the ground wid it, me bye. Whisper," says she, and, leaning up to my ear as if the kitchen, with its clocks ticking, had been crowded with secret-service men, she told me what we was to do.

"We must quarrel and fight contin'ous," she says, "ye and yer poor old mother-in-law," she says.

"It must be strong," she says, with a rascally look in her wrinkled eyes, "fast and furious and vi'lent," she says. "Throw plates," she says, "and mind yer don't hit me, or I'll lose me temper," she says, "and then ye'll have something to regret," she says.

It was she who started it. It was the next morning at breakfast, with the sunlight pouring through the windows and taking the chill out of the air. But my Annie looked as if she'd never had a friend. Her head was hanging, and now and then she'd cough so as not to let her hand get out of practice. The old lady was bringing the coffee-pot from the stove to the table, and all of a sudden she stops.

"Well!" she says; "it's a wonder ye wouldn't say good morning to me, Jim Hands," she says. "You old pieface!" she says. "Anybody would think I was a rent collector by the way ye act to me since I've been in the house," she says, and with that she let the coffee-pot dangle down till a stream of it began to run out the spout.

"For the love of Heaven, see what you're doing!" screams Annie. "And what's the matter between you and Jim?"

"I'll soon tell ye," says the old woman, winking at me. "I ain't treated with no respect," she says. "Me and me sixty-eight years," she says. "And I won't take no more av yer abuse, Jim Hands. If we can't have love between us, we'll have something else."

And with that she threw the coffee-pot and all into the coal-scuttle.

“Mother! Mother! Be quiet, dear,” says Annie.

“Let the old bird go home if she don’t like it,” I says.

“Listen to him!” the old lady yells; and sitting down to the table, she says, “I’ll eat me breakfast in spite of him — he’s always starting these rows, darlin’,” she says. “I think he’s crazy as a tooth dying,” she says.

We had another row at night, too, and breakfast the next morning, and so it went.

About three weeks later, one evening, when I came home, I found Dr. Ward had dropped in for more expense, and I was half scared to death for fear he’d ask about the medicine. But he’d only come to sit in the parlor and look at his finger-nails and say, “How is our patient been these days?”

“About the same, doctor,” says my Annie.

“Any more pains under the shoulder?” says he.

“That’s better,” says Annie.

“H’m! H’m!” says he, marking off the roses in the carpet with the toe of his boot.

It weren’t till then I noticed the old lady, who was sitting on the sofa, was moving her big weight up and down on the springs.

And she says, “H’m! H’m!” after the doctor, and got up and waddles over to where he was sitting.

“Why don’t ye come out with it?” she says. “What

satisfaction will the girl get unless ye give it a name she can tell to the neighbors?" she says.

"Say no more," I whispers to her.

"Things is too quiet," she says to me.

"I don't believe you quite understand," says Charlie Ward, fingering his collar.

"And the same to you, and many av them," the old lady says. She was off, and I couldn't stop her. "The next thing we know," she says, "you'll be wanting to cut her open for a look inside," she says.

The doctor raises up and blinks at her, and Annie says, "Mother, you've said enough."

"'Twill surprise ye all to hear what I'm keeping back," says the old lady. "The doctor wouldn't have to listen to it through that rubber tube of his, ayther. 'Twould be aisy to dognose my mind when I was through."

"Excuse me," says Ward, getting up and reaching for his fur cap. "I must be going."

With that the old lady pokes her finger at him. "Ho! ho! me pill-shooter," says she, with a wicked grin, "we understand each other, don't we? And you, Jim, sit still; if ye go to begging pardons for me, I may bring shame on me own gray hairs," she says.

"Hush, doctor," she says, going on with her loose talk. "Let's you and I invent a disayse. What d'ye say, old sawbones?"

"Oh, mother, dear," cries Annie, plucking at the old lady's checked dress. "You ain't talking like yourself. Is everybody crazy?"

But she could not stop her. The doctor was red with his temper, and it kinder seemed as if he couldn't speak. But that didn't stop her, either.

"I know a name for it," she says, "but I'll not tell ye, doctor. You'd take it away to frighten folks wid it, ye sly old dog," she says.

"Mother, mother!" says Annie again, but the doctor was gone; and though I was afraid he wouldn't never come back, I had to laugh.

"What are ye grinning about?" says the old lady to me. "Insulting me again, are ye?"

So it went. Such rowing and noise you never heard in one house, and Annie was getting better.

The only thing that set her back was hearing from the Sister Superior that Katherine had won some sort of a prize and had gained twelve pounds. It made her feel peaceful again.

It was on a Monday that the big fuss came. I remember I had been out in the yard after breakfast to pick up a shovel that had got lost that winter under the snow, and when I came back, the old woman was scrubbing clothes in the wash-tubs in the kitchen, and Annie was sitting in a rocking-chair all tired out, as she said.

"Look there, ye nephew of the devil," yells the old

lady to me. "See the mud ye've tracked across the floor, ye clodhopper!" says she, shaking her fist.

"The floor ain't clean, anyway," says I, which was the truth. "The house ain't clean, and it ain't been real clean since you've been cleaning it," says I.

"Oh, ho!" says she. "That's the gratichude I gets for washing out these shirts of yours —" And she held one up out of the tub, with the water and soap dripping from it, and winks at me.

"Jim don't mean anything," says Annie. "Don't let's be cross all the time," she says.

I seen then that our row was having a good effect, and as luck would have it, I remembered then that I'd never really done my part to make it seem like real trouble in the house.

So I reaches out and snaps the cloth out of her hand, and I says, says I, "What's a shirt to me after you've made a rag of it trying to wash it?" And I grabs it in my two hands and rips it into two pieces.

"Oh, Jim, Jim," screams Annie, "that weren't your shirt at all! 'Twas mother's Sunday waist!"

I seen she was right, but I winked at the old lady and yells, "What do I care? The house is all to pieces because of her," I yells, and I rips out a couple of careful swear words, being in jest. "She's a trouble-making old lunatic," says I. "Yes, that's what you are — you, standing up there at the tub with your mouth always going wherever your mind may be —

if you have a mind. I'm tired of seeing you walking round here like a butterball — you and your fat!" says I.

The old lady looks at me a minute, and I expected to see her wink again, but instead of that she grabs the washboard out of the water and tries to come at me right over the chair.

"I'll show ye!" she yells, rushing at me, and you'd thought a house was flung at you, to see her come. She was red in the face, and for that second I had my doubts.

Then it was crack! She beat the washboard on my head with both hands, and split the back of it and loosened up the tin part.

"I'll show ye how far to go wid a joke," she says, out of breath, and smashed at me again so it cut me over the eye. I put up my hand, and I seen she'd drawn blood, and I ran out through the hall and up the stairs, with Annie at my heels, who was crying and scared.

It was half an hour before I went down, and I knew I'd be late to work. I was kinder shy of meeting the old lady, too. I was afraid she didn't know when to let well enough alone. I peeped around the door and seen her sitting in the rocking-chair. And she was holding her sides with laughter.

"Whist! Jim," she says, "come in. I forgot myself — I was that mad! I don't mind names, but I'm not pleased wid mention of me fat, dear," she says.

"So I see by my nose here," says I, feeling of it.

"How did Annie take it?" she says.

"It's near broken her heart," I says. "She cried as if her heart would break," I says. "She says I wasn't like her old Jim any more, and she would never know her own mother. It was pitiful to see her, poor girl. She thinks all her happiness is gone."

"Good!" says the old woman. "That's fine. She'll be hunting for it soon."

And it was so. It was one of them days in the spring when things is just beginning to know that it's time to come out and blink their eyes in the sunlight, and when I came home at night, there was little Michael and John at the door to call out to me.

"Where did you come from?" I says, putting my arm around the two of them. "What was the matter?"

"Nothing," they says.

"Where's your mother?" I says.

"Getting supper," says Michael.

"Where's your grandmother?" says I.

"She's laying down upstairs," says John.

"Laying down!" says I.

"Yes," says they.

So I walks back quick to the kitchen, and there was my Annie watching a pot boiling on the stove, with her sleeves up and her arms in the wash-tub.

"What are you doing?" I says. "The doctor gave you his orders," I says.

She smiled up at me and says: "I have no time for you or them orders, dear. The children came back this afternoon, and such a load of dirty clothes as they brought! So I had to start washing, and get out blankets and sheets for their beds, and sweep up the house a little, and move the oak bureau back into the front room, and go to the butcher's for more dinner, and set the table over, and mend a hole in little John's stocking. And now I'm glad to see you home, Jim. Have you had a hard day?"

"No," says I.

"Nor I," says she, "but I feel like I might sleep good to-night. I believe my cough is going away," she says.

And at that minute John and Michael, the rascals, chasing each other through the parlor, knocks over something. We heard it fall and smash into pieces, and the laughing and running stopped.

"Ain't it nice, Jim, dear," says she, "to hear the children?" she says.

"You ain't given me time," I says, "to ask how they happened to come back," I says.

With that she comes up to me and puts her wet hand in mine. "You'll not scold me, Jim," says she, "for I sent for them by telegraph," she says, "and, you know, if it hadn't been for you, Jim, I never would have let them go away," she says — "especially the daughter," she says.

"Oh, yes," I says, "it was my fault," I says. "You

know I've been a husband and father so long," I says. "I begged for a little rest and peace," I says, very sarcastic. "Why don't you speak up, dear," I says, "and tell me when the girl is coming home?"

"Well," says she, laughing, "I've decided to make a sacrifice for you. She's coming on the noon train to-morrow."

I could hardly wait for it. And the next day I put on a new necktie and brushed up my old hat. A kinder funny feeling had come over me. I went and looked in the glass in the hall. And I began to have queer notions myself. I began to be afraid. I says to myself, "A year will make a lot of difference. She may not approve of the old man. I ain't very handsome, and if I paid a hundred dollars for a suit of clothes, by evening it would have a thousand wrinkles and the coat would hang like a flannellette nightgown, and there'd be a couple of spots where I had sat down on something. You're one of that kind," I says to myself. "And you don't talk French or read Latin in the evenings, and nobody'd take you for a railroad president — not even after the rates had been regulated. Do you suppose she'll ever see the day she'll be ashamed of you? Stop thinking so foolish," I says in my own ear. "This is the first time you worried about them inward matters." And then I thought if she didn't always love me a little it would be kinder bad.

And I stood there on the platform that noon, and I

remember the Old Boss's family — the Harveys — had come to meet somebody, and all of them — the Old Man and his youngest daughter and all of 'em — smiled and bowed to me, and it seemed vague, like something you see after you've got a blow on the head.

Then I seen my girl get off the train. And I seen she had hatched, and I seen she weren't no dull brown moth.

It was when we'd got home and she'd shown me that I was a good deal to her still and all that was off my mind that I suddenly noticed. I was standing on the doorstep with my Annie beside me and watching Katherine chasing little John around the lawn. And I says to Annie: "Ain't she wonderful? She's different!"

But it was only after supper that I knew. I was smoking right here, and the girl came in graceful and easy and fresh from the outdoors, and sat down on the other side of the table.

"Was it a dull journey alone?" I says.

"I met a boy that used to be in the high school when I was there," she says, "and he was with some others — from the college. He spoke to me," she says, picking up a book, "and —"

"And what?" I says.

"We talked," she says.

"All the way?" says I.

"Most all the way," she says, and with that I put down the *Argus* and leaned forward.

“Who was the young man?” I says.

At that she laughed one of them little wriggling laughs that has made many a lad tell his judgment to go on about its business. “Don’t worry,” she says, “I have been cured of all the foolish talk that you used to complain of,” she says, putting her soft hand on mine. “We had a very interesting and sensible conversation,” says she.

“Who was the young man?” I says again.

“Why, it was Robert Harvey,” she says.

“The Boss’s son!” says I, kinder nervous.

“He is very nice,” she says quietly, and she laughed. And then I seen a look come into her face. It was just a flicker, and I knew she weren’t a little girl any more.

CHAPTER V

ROBERT HARVEY is the only boy the Old Boss has got. He'd been away at St. John's School down at the Capital, and then to college, and I couldn't remember just what kind of a boy he was. All I could remember about him was when he was a youngster in our town high school, and that he was kinder thin and girlish-looking. I remembered one day seeing him playing football on the common then, and how a big fellow named Jenks, the undertaker's son, flung himself on to him, and the boy's head struck on a gravel path. You know how them pictures stick in your mind. I thought they had killed him, but he got up and shook his head and went on playing — blind. You'd thought he had the fighting spirit of a mink. It looked funny, because he had a face like a woman, with soft dark hair and pink complexion, like the Boss's youngest daughter, Anna.

The Old Boss was always talking about that boy. I guess the factory and money and maybe eyesight weren't nothing compared with that boy he used to talk about. He used to mention him to me and tell me he was still playing football in college and working on the second team, I think he said; for I remember the Boss said the boy was too light in weight to do much, and was just

playing like a dead game sport without a chance for cups or pins or glory. The Old Boss used to talk to me a little closer than the other men. And so it was a surprise to me the next week when I seen Robert Harvey.

He was down on Main Street with a tennis racket and a couple of young girls — friends of his sisters, they were, and you could see they had money and belonged to the kind of people that the Boss's family liked to travel with.

He had grown up a good deal. He weren't very handsome, either, but he had a steady eye and one of them gaits as he walked that you hardly ever see except in good honest feet. He had grown strong, and yet there still was that look of devilment in his face, with them blue eyes and brown skin and soft hair underneath his hat.

It frightened me. Ain't that funny? The minute I seen him laughing and talking with them girls I thought of the funny little look in Katherine's face, and I found myself trying to think out what the big gap was between the Old Boss and me, and his family and mine. I thought of money. They had a lot of it. And I thought of name. And they had that. And I guess for the first time I felt sore about it, and begun to wonder what the difference was. I must have been a fool.

And then all of a sudden it seemed to me that this young Bob Harvey, with all he had, weren't good

enough for my girl. There weren't none of 'em good enough for her. "And after all," I says to myself, "it's all a matter of nothing," I says, as I was going into Eddie Terhew's hardware store after a couple of hinges for Annie's new china closet. "Just a talk on a train," I says to myself, "and just a chat or two on Main Street," I says, "and just because he stopped at my barn on his way home from rabbit-hunting, it don' mean anything," I says.

I suppose the real truth come to me because of that affair with Jerry Pollock. Ain't it funny how one thing leads to another? Fellers with them stoop shoulders like Jerry's is apt to be a good deal like him, but Jerry is more so than any of 'em.

What I mean is that Jerry was one of these good, quiet, gentle fellers who went to a church, though not to Father Ryan's, and was always wondering whether the lightning was going to strike his house, and half expecting the cutworms was going to ruin his squashes, and fearing every sore throat was going to be diphtheria sure, and had a wife with a kind of square jaw, easy-hung, and bony hands and a dry skin. You know them fellers — them good old family horses?

Jerry Pollock never had but one vacation in his life. I don't mean going away from work to a beach and getting so sunburned you can't laugh without cracking your ear, and buying picture-frames made of sea-shells for your aunts, and having the kids get stung by mos-

quitos till they look just the way cracker crumbs in the bed feels. You'll see what I mean when I tell you. And great guns! it was going some.

You never knew Jerry the way I did for more'n ten years. He was right at the next bench to me when I first come to work for the Old Boss, and before I thought I'd ever be urged along by my Annie and get to be foreman of the room. So I knew him on all sides, at the factory and also at home, because that's his house just back of mine. It would make you laugh to see him come running out of that little barn when his wife called him, or maybe stand up in front of her and twirl his hat like a boy when she was telling him to hurry up and go downtown for a roll of ribbon for her or a bottle of patent medicine. She was some woman!

Yes, sir, she was! I don't mean he wasn't fond of her; that ain't so. He'd probably have done things for her, even if he had his own choice, though maybe not so quick. And anyhow, there was a lot to respect about her. She looked kinder severe and the like of that, but I noticed she made jelly to give away when anybody was sick; and the Clancy family, that was left when their old man was sent away for breaking and entering the depot, could tell you that them lines running up from her nose into her forehead give her heart a bad name that weren't deserved. And then, besides, there ain't nothing Mrs. Pollock didn't do well. You know there are women like that — them that

have good luck with potted plants and popovers and hens and them embroidery sales and strawberry festivals that the Protestant churches has. But at that her voice sounded like a "no-smoking" sign looks, and she had them gray eyes.

Jerry was the kind of a husband them women have. He was a good worker at the factory here, and would say "My goodness!" instead of some full-mouthed word, and voted the Republican ticket because it seemed to him respectable, but wouldn't discuss politics much, and got awful mad and ran his fingers around his collar when he did. You know how them Republicans are. He thought a good deal of the heathen in India and missionaries, and never went to them one-night-stand shows that come to a little factory town like this, and wore black neckties and square-toed shoes, and carried a mustache comb in his vest pocket. He didn't ever play cards, and he said baseball oughter be stopped because the boys bet on it and lost their money, and I guess he might have smoked two cigars a year — one on Christmas, and the other the day his wife went down to her sister's funeral or something.

They were thrifty — them two. Once in a while, maybe, Jerry would buy you a soda-water if he met you looking bust and thirsty in front of the drug store. But you could see that, as they say, he sorter made an occasion of it. He'd act kinder sly and put his forefinger up beside the mole on his nose or maybe rub his

hands together and make a joke and say, "It's awful hot, Jim, and a man that's done a good day's work oughter give himself and his friend a chance to taste the taste of something."

"Sweetened wind?" you'd say. And then he'd laugh and rub his hands again and go and study them nickle-plated faucets to see what flavor he'd have, and then all the time he was drinking he'd keep looking out over his glass just as if he was afraid of being caught by Mrs. Pollock; and when he'd set the expense down in a little notebook, he'd sigh as if it hurt him, and next day he'd mention the soda to you. He'd say, "Weren't that a nice soda we had?" just as if he didn't want you to forget it. You'd never thought he'd go through what I'm going to tell you — not a feller like that!

It all come about because one hot night along that September, Ben Joline, who's bottoming foreman, was setting down in one of them chairs on the sidewalk outside the Phenix Hotel. If he hadn't been there without anything to do and looking idle and good-natured, Jerry Pollock would always have been the same old Jerry Pollock. But Ben sat there and a feller sat there too, leaning back up against the wall and looking at people who passed, and chewing a toothpick the way you do when you're in a strange town.

This second feller, Ben says, was a travelling man for a collar concern, and he certainly was some dresser.

He had a fancy band on his straw hat and a changeable silk necktie and a big pin and a suit of clothes with a big check in it. And it weren't the check so much as the colors. Maybe you'd call 'em wall-paper colors. They was something you could see at night.

By and by, when a good many stores had closed up and there weren't many people passing any more, the stranger rubbed his hand over his black mustache and he says, "I feel just like sitting in a game of poker," says he. It would have been all right if it hadn't been for the fact that just as he said it, a big fat feller come out the screen door of the hotel. He was a jolly-looking feller — one of them that kinder seems to love everybody and has a big voice and knows a lot of funny stories. He didn't look like any harm to nobody. And he heard the remark that was passed, and give one of them fat men's gurgles that sounds like water in a steam radiator. "Sic semper tyrannis," he says, "and also a couple of good erat demonstrandums," he says. "No sooner said than done," he says. "If you two gentlemen would like to play," he says, "I'll wake up a feller I know slightly who's gone to bed in room thirty-two," says he.

The first I knew about it was Saturday afternoon, the next day. Jerry Pollock and his wife had stopped in when they was going by our house, and was setting on our front steps, and my Annie had made 'em some lemonade. And as we was setting there, the old feller

that drives the bus for the Phenix Hotel went by, and he leaned over the gate and says, "If either of you wants a suit of clothes that's pretty swell, you can buy one very cheap from a travelling man down at the hotel. He's trying to raise the money to pay his hotel bill," he says.

I knew Jerry and maybe old lady Pollock would sit up when they heard talk about buying something cheap.

"Huh," says Jerry, rubbing that pointed chin of his, "what kind of a suit is it?"

"It's a checked suit; it's almost new," says the feller, "and about your size," he says, squinting one eye as if he was fitting it onto Jerry. "Though it might be a little late around the shoulders," he says.

At that I seen them thrifty looks on Mrs. Pollock's face.

"It might be a bargain," she says. "I think you oughter see it, anyway, Jerry," she says. "Could the suit be worn as best — to church?" she says.

"Well," says the bus driver, "I could recommend it for most anything but that," he says. "I don't know just how to tell you," he says, "except to say that in church it might look as if it had been worn right through from Saturday night," he says, "and give the wrong impression," he says.

But even after he'd gone, you could see that Jerry and his wife was thinking about the suit, and then

Monday at the factory when it got to be noon hour, Jerry come over to me and he says, "Well, Jim, the travelling man has left town," he says.

"You don't say," says I. "You bought the suit?"

"Yes," says Jerry. "I hope you won't say nothing to anybody about it," he says, "for, of course, it's second-hand," says he. "Yes," he says, "it's fine goods," he says. "I felt of it careful," he says, "and tried it on," he says. "The feller's name was Todd," he says, "and he showed me a tag on the collar all worked in yellow silk, and told me the fit was just right; that I looked like a man with a roll in my pocket big enough to choke a horse, and that when I walked out with that suit, people would forget that Main Street wasn't Broadway," he says. "And Martha says I'd better wear it for everyday," says he.

So the next morning he come down to the factory with it. He was one of the men that change into their work clothes after they get into the coat room, and when he come in there was certainly some excitement!

Dave Pierson says to him, "Jerry, in spite of your gray hairs, I'm going to tell it to you straight — you look like a real sport. You look like a promoter," he says.

"It's sure true," says Ed Welch, "you look like a man that sits in a box on the grand stand and talks over the edge to the book-maker's runners," he says. "But that black necktie is all wrong," says he. "It's

like a dead fly in a dish of ice-cream," he says. "You'll certainly have to get a tie to go with the suit," he says.

Jerry was pleased, and then he kinder scratched his gray hairs and felt of his black tie and sighed, and all day there was somebody telling him they'd seen him come in with his new suit, and that he looked just like December twenty-fifth, or like a mine-owner, or a man who owned a string of horses, or a New York hotel, and the like of that. So the next day when he come down he was wearing a new tie he'd bought at the New York Emporium. And the tie sounded a good deal like the noise you make when you hammer iron pipe.

The suit was certainly getting in its work on Jerry. Wearing that suit, as far as he was concerned, was like keeping bad company. And he liked to have people see it and how nice it fitted him, and Saturday he went out to the ball-game, though I guess his Martha didn't know it, and when the seventh inning come around and the score was near tied, he went with them eager fellers out back of third base, and even hollered and abused the pitcher of the Turner's Falls team. And somebody said he lost fifty cents on the game. Maybe he did, for he seemed to have remorse the next day. He was kinder solemn and thoughtful.

But it didn't last long. A few days later in the evening I seen him in his suit in the pool-room at the back of the barber's shop. He was sitting in a chair in front of the ball-rack, laughing and talking and kinder wrig-

gling them stoop shoulders of his, and his eyes was bright and shiny, and he looked as if he wished he knew enough about playing to go into the game for a quarter a cue.

"I thought you said you was reading a book called the 'Rise and Fall of the Something Empire,'" I says; "reading evenings," I says.

"Well, I am," he says, "only in a dull little town like this," he says, "a man can't stay at home all the time and get narrow and old-fashioned and out of the run of things," he says. "You know I don't drink," he says, smoothing down his trousers and shaking his legs to make 'em fall right. "And so I miss that relaxation," he says, kinder sighing. "But come over to the drug store, Jim," he says, "and have a glass of flavored bubbles," he says. And when we gets over there, he kinder swings one leg over the other, careless, and says to Joe, "Give us a couple of plates of sasparilla water," he says.

I looked at the suit then, and I looked at it again the next day. I kinder made up my mind that any man who wears a uniform feels like a brave soldier. I thought of it when I heard some feller going by under the wash-room winder trip on a stone or something, and rip out one of them tainted words. I threw the soap into the sink and looked out and I seen the suit. I says to myself, "That weren't Jerry talking, that was them checks."

To tell you the truth, I don't know what would have

become of him if it hadn't been for the grand wind-up that come and broke the spell.

I remember about the last of September the factory closed down one Friday and Saturday because there was a shift in the line of goods we were making, and they had to get in new lasts and dies and the like of that. It's funny how restless you feel when you ain't at work on one of the regular days, and how you keep starting inside with the feeling that you oughter be down at the factory, and 'then when you get over that, you wonder what you'll do in the afternoon. Sometimes I even wish that I could go down to work the same as ever. It seems as if there'd be a good deal of fun in it. And I think that maybe there's a whole lot of excitement in what folks call drudgery, after all.

Anyhow, Saturday morning I'd fed the horses and my Annie had come out to the back door with little Mike pulling at her apron to tell me breakfast was ready, when I seen Jerry Pollock coming across that patch he had planted with potatoes, and I seen him wave his hand to me, and when he come up you could see he was all stirred up over something.

"Jim," he says, "the worm has turned!" he says. "You know the Barrington Fair and Cattle Show?" he says. "Has a midway," he says, winking wicked, "and horse-races and balloon ascension with triple parachute drop," he says. "And this is the big day," he says.

"I said to Martha we'd take you and Mrs. Hands and go. I said yes and she said no. She said no at five o'clock this morning."

"It's too bad," I says, "if you set your heart on it."

"What's too bad?" he says, sticking out his narrow chest. "I guess you don't understand. I said we was going," says he.

"Oh, that's all right," he says; "she didn't want to spend the money," he says, smiling very conceited. "But she's resigned to it now," he says. "And I'm going to borrow that Jordan carryall to hitch my horse into, and go home and put on some clothes, and then by that time you'll be ready?" he says. And he stepped up close as if somebody was listening up in the trees, and he whispers, "Yesterday I got paid a hundred dollars on that Smith mortgage. I'm going to carry the money to-day, Jim," he says. "It's a kinder comfort to feel a roll in your pocket that would choke a horse," he says, using the words of the collar drummer. "It gives you a peculiar assurance," he says, waving his hand at me as he went off. "Not that I mean to spend any of it," he says.

With that I went to the back door and had a talk with Annie. I hadn't been for two or three years, and my Annie was glad of the drive, and there's always something of the girl in her. I remember she come and put her hands on my shoulder when I was drinking

my coffee and she says, "The only thing I'm sorry for is that we didn't think in time so's we could have gone alone — just you and I."

"And Katherine?" I says, looking at the daughter.

"Oh, no," says she. "Just you and mother," she says. "For I know if I was married," says she, "married the way I'd want to be, I'd like sometimes to be all alone with *him*, — him with a big H," she says, laughing. "Besides," she says, "it's best to break up in twos, after all," she says. And I didn't know then what it was she had on her mind.

It was a fine day with a cool bite in the air and sunny, and you know how nice a fair-ground looks on that kind of a day, with white tents and a man selling blue tickets, and the red cloth they use at cane-toss games, and the sound of barkers and a cloud of dust on the race track, and the music of the band that comes louder or fades away according to the shift of the breeze, and cows hollering in them long sheds, and crazy-quilts hung around the door of the exposition building, and the grand stand filled up with people so's it looks like the top of a basket of mixed berries, some red and some blue and some black or yellow. And you can hear the gong on the judge's stand, and maybe see a feller holding a couple of children by the hand and looking up at the picture of a wild man all in bright colors on a canvas, or maybe two women standing right in the middle of the path between them rows of waffle and

sausage and lemonade concessions, quarrelling and making the crowd walk one side or the other.

It was right there that Jerry got his full enjoyment. He rung a cane and carried it kinder sheepish just the way I'd feel smoking a cigarette, but you could tell he felt first-rate in that suit, and when his wife and my Annie went over to the big indoor exhibit, he pulled out the handkerchief his wife had made him stick around his collar, and he went up one side of the midway, wanting to see everything, and invited me in to see the Old Plantation show with fourteen genuine old-time darky dancers and singers of negro melodies, as it said, but I didn't think the show was half as good as the sample they gave outside to make you want to see more. And then he stopped to see the Japanese rolling-ball game, and the girl with bleached hair and a dirty blue kimona that was running it picked him right out and bowed and hollers in a voice just like a man's: "Here's a man that's a good old scout. He's a sport, he is. He'll take a chance," she says, like that. "It can't make you or break you, mister. You get a present in any case — yes, sir. You bet I can size people up. It's a dime, mister — what's a dime to a man of your calibre?"

So Jerry smiled. "Here's a half a dollar!" he says, careless. "Give me them balls," he says. But he didn't win anything, and he looked kinder disappointed, and felt of his roll of money to see if it was still there, and got a touch of remorse.

Maybe she seen him; anyhow she says, "Lean over here," says she, confidential. "I know this game ain't the real thing. But why don't you two gents walk right around this booth? There's a little harmless diversion going on there. You bet I can size up a sport when I see him. There's something about you —" she says to him.

At that you could see that Jerry felt more devilish than ever in that suit. "Come on, Jim," he says, "let's investigate. When things is going on, I want to be in 'em. That's me!" he says, and off he started.

It weren't more than a step or two, and when I looked around the corner I seen ten or a dozen men around a feller with a little stand. I knew in a minute it weren't nothing but the same old shell-game, only this feller had four of them heavy china cups instead of shells, and lumps of sugar instead of peas. One of the men who was betting won just as we got there, and Jerry's eyes stuck out to see the four yellow-back bills counted out to him.

"Don't you be a fool," I says to him, easy.

"A fool?" he says, kinder mad. "No, I ain't! I wouldn't play this game; it's wrong; but I'm going to watch! I bet I could see closer than some," he says, whispering and pushing his way up close to the table. The feller who was running the game held his hand up in the air to shake his cuffs way up his arm, and he felt of a diamond pin in his tie and pulled his black

mustache and kinder looked at Jerry with one eye as if he was sad and weary about something.

“Well, this is a bad day for me,” says the feller. “Yes, gents, a bad day. I’ve lost heavy to-day.” And then he took one lump of sugar and began to shift it under first one cup and then another, and finally he put it under one of the cups on the right and he says, “Well, gents, you’ve seen the lump. Maybe you know where it is. Maybe you don’t. I ain’t saying whether you do or don’t. I’m just offering to bet one dollar, five dollars, ten dollars, it’s under this here cup,” he says, and he put his hand on the cup further to the left. You oughter seen Jerry’s eyes!

He leans close to me and he whispers, “Jim, I’ve got him. The sugar has fallen out and it’s rolled right under my hand!” And he turned to the feller and pulled out a ten-dollar bill and laid it down, and says, with his voice shaking, “I bet it ain’t under any cup.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” says the feller, looking sadder and sleepier than ever. “Well, anybody else?” he says. “No? Well,” he says, lifting the left-hand cup, “there’s the sugar!”

It was, sure enough! Jerry’s mouth was open. His eyes was red, and he lifted his hand and showed another lump under it. But the feller just pretended to be mad.

“What kinder monkey-shines are you trying?” he says. “This game is straight, and if you can’t come

around here without bringing a lump of sugar to fool me and maybe cheat somebody else, don't come at all," he says. "I caught you," he says, sticking Jerry's bill into his pocket. "You must think I'm a mark!" he says.

"I didn't bring the lump. It rolled under my hand just now," says Jerry, looking surprised and mad and dizzy. And most everybody laughed. So Jerry walked off, and when he'd got around the corner he kinder gasped like a feller that goes through the ice in the winter-time. You could see he was crazy about losing the ten, and mad and hurt in the pride all at once.

"Ten dollars!" he says, holding on to my coat, and then he says, "I saw how he did it. By thunder! I've got a good mind to go back and just clean him out. If I wasn't afraid of losing, I'd do it, for he can't fool me. I've seen how he does it."

"Jerry," I says, "you're older than I am; you oughter know better. Nobody stands a show with that feller. You can't win unless he wants to have you win. The quicker you bet, the quicker you lose. That's all," I says.

"Everybody's got a right to their own opinion," he says, kinder sour, and then we had to go and meet Annie and Mrs. Pollock at the entrance to the grand stand, and I bought some seats, and we picked out the horses we thought would win, and both women always chose any horse that was jet black. They look faster to

women. And they laughed and had a good time, but Jerry was sullen and sore, and I guess he even forgot about his checked suit.

And it was while we was sitting there that Annie grabbed my arm and pressed it with them busy fingers of hers.

“Look, Jim!” she whispers. “Who is that sitting down there in that yellow dog-cart?” she says, and I seen her turn color a little.

I looked where she was pointing. It was down where carriages drive up near the whitewashed fence to watch the races. And there I seen the Boss’s horse with her ears pricked up, and behind her there sat the boy and my girl. Maybe it was just as luck would have it. They weren’t looking at the race at all. It gave me a shock. They was looking at each other. And right then I knew misfortune had come to us. I knew it as well as if a voice had told me.

CHAPTER VI

I SUPPOSE the thing that woke me up was the voice of Mrs. Pollock. "I wonder where Jerry went," she says. "Probably to get some peanuts. He's so thoughtful," she says.

But I didn't stop to hear. I felt like a warden that has forgot to lock the jail, and I jumped up and says, "I'll be back in a few minutes," and I ran down the steps and around the race-track fence, back to where the tents and booths were, and I went in around the Japanese rolling-ball game, and when I got a first look I knew it was too late.

There was Jerry with his hat off and his eyes wild and red and his breath coming short and a half-dozen men laughing at him.

He was talking to the feller that run the cup and sugar game. "You cheat!" he says. "You robbed me," he says, "a hundred dollars and more!" he says. "Give it back," he says, "or I'll complain of you," says he.

"On your way!" says the feller. "You want me to lose all the time?" he says. "Is that it?" says he. "Now take it from me," he says, pointing with his finger.

"You move on! Don't stay around here disturbing these gentlemen. Where'd you hire that checked suit?" he says.

I could see I'd better take Jerry away. So I got him by the arm, and he called me some hot names, but he came with me just the same, and I thought he was going to cry, he was that frightened. "I promised to buy a runabout for Martha with that money. She's been looking forward to it for two years," he says.

I felt sorry for him.

Finally he says, "Jim, will you tell my wife for me?" he says, grabbing my arm. "You don't know how much I'd appreciate it," says he. "Somehow I believe it would save talk," he says. "I've got to tell her. She knew I had the money. I can't lie to her. You tell her, Jim. If you'll do that, I'll go down and harness the horse and never ask you to do a thing," says he. "Tell it all," says he. "Everything you tell will save me a couple of days of talk," says he.

I'm a good-natured fool, I guess. Anyhow, I told him to go hitch up and we'd come down at half-past six, ready to eat our lunch that Annie had put up, and then drive home. But after I left him I could see them gray eyes of Mrs. Pollock and them wrinkles in her forehead. I could hear her voice and I could see a Marathon talking contest. I began to look for a hole right then. I ain't a coward, but I can be mighty discreet in them matters. And I can be mighty foxy,

too. I tell you what I did. I got my Annie to one side, and she was the one I told.

"Well," she says, very solemn. "It may not be your fault. You say it ain't. And I suppose it must be done. Jim, dear, it's terrible," she says. "I never knew a man to change so at his time of life. He was so quiet when he was himself," she says. "I wish his wife weren't such a competent woman," she says, and she went over and got Jerry's wife and she let her have it.

I thought the woman was going to faint away and then come too and talk it out. What do you think! She never said a word! She just shut her jaws tight and brushed out her skirt and looked like somebody that ain't ready to act but is getting ready. She never said a word till we got down to the hitching-shed. The carryall was there and the horse.

"Where's Mr. Pollock, my husband?" she says, looking at me as if I'd eaten him.

"I couldn't tell you, ma'am," I says, easy and persuading. "I left him here a half hour ago."

"There's nothing to do but wait," says Annie. "You don't suppose he's playing, as you call it, any more."

"I do not," says I. "He ain't got any of what's most necessary," I says, and sat down on a box. I sat there and listened to Mrs. Pollock's foot. It was tapping on the bottom of the carriage. It's one of them ugly sounds women makes. And I sat there listening

to that and the crickets in the grass and the band a long way off. It was getting cool, too, and I wished I was going to sit down to a warm supper at home, and the girl was on my mind.

It weren't quite dark when Jerry showed up. You oughter see him. His checked suit was covered with mud, and he had a red swelling on his forehead. But instead of hanging his head and looking humble, he danced in like an old horse that's been doctored with liquor. His wife give him a terrible glare, poor woman, but it didn't do no good. So she tried the voice.

"Well!" she says.

"Huh!" says Jerry. "I suppose you all are guessing," he says, rubbing his hands. "I suppose you all think I'm the kind of a man that will let people get the best of me and be down. Not me!"

"You ain't been doing it again?" I says.

"No," says, he, "I ain't. I did something surer than that," he says squaring them narrer shoulders of his. "I thought that cheating feller might go to the village for his supper, and he did. Who follered him? I did. Who fought with him when he got to a nice quiet place with nobody around? Me! Who licked him? Me! That's me."

"Pooh!" says Mrs. Pollock, rising up and swelling. "You ain't content with gambling. You must go and fight like a common tough. Ain't you a nice apology! Fighting won't ever buy that runabout!"

"Huh!" says Jerry. "I ain't so sure." And with that he digs down into the pants pocket of that checked suit and pulls out a couple of handfuls of bills and holds 'em up. "I took 'em away from him," he says — "just what was right to a dollar!" And he brushes some dust off the front of his coat. "There's more'n one way to be a sport," he says, looking at the money. "That's me," he says. "I ain't afraid of anybody," he says.

I guess Mrs. Pollock was thinking fast just then.

"Jerry," she says, "you give me that money — every cent of it! You give me that money, and I'll never say a word about these terrible events as long as I live. Give it to me."

"You bet!" says he.

And I'll always remember how he looked then in that checked suit, trying to give her that money fast and close the bargain in a hurry.

And I remember the look on Mrs. Pollock's face as she says, "When we get home," she says, "you take off that checked suit and do it up and send it to the missionary alliance," she says. "When you wear it, one thing is plain enough. I'm taking awful risks with my husband," she says.

It was only when we got in to start home I knew my Annie had been thinking about Katherine and thinking hard. "Mr. Hands and I will sit together in the back seat," she says, very persuading, and I seen Jerry give a

look loaded full of fright, for he was afraid that maybe even the money he'd given his wife wouldn't be enough to stop a conversation full of woe and trouble enough to beat disease and death. He was scared it might break loose if he sat beside her, and all the sport in him had gone.

We drove down over by Hendricks' farm, through them dark, cool woods, and it weren't till we crossed over the rattling wooden bridge below the spring that Annie leans over and whispers to me. She only said one word, but you could tell everything by that.

"Katherine," she says.

I shook my head and says, "Yes."

"Oh, Jim, dear," she says, "it goes to show a wife oughter tell everything. But I didn't want to worry you. It was almost two weeks ago he came up Sunday afternoon when you was off shooting with Ben Joline. And I told Katherine she'd better not go walking with him, but she laughed at me and said I was getting silly, and she tied the bow at my neck and told me I was the best old warrior she ever knew. I'm a weak mother," says she; "I was jollied. I let her go, and the pair of 'em walked away strong and healthy across the fields. It would do you good to see 'em."

"It's the Boss's son," I says, shaking my head. "If he don't love her strong — with the kind that makes a man see there ain't but one woman among 'em all, the kind that makes him look up into the sky and wonder

who made so good a world for him and her — then,” I says, “it’s a bad day for all of us. For,” I says, “I think she loves him.”

“And if he really loves her?” says she. “What then?”

“Annie,” I says, “I don’t know. He’s the Boss’s son. I hardly know how to think,” I says. “I feel like an Iowa farmer trying to catch deep-sea fish with potato for bait,” I says. “It can’t be true,” I says, “but if it is — there’s trouble, even then,” I says.

I seen her jaw set hard, as if she knew what I meant. “Katherine is better than he or any other man deserves,” she says. “Mark my words, Jim. There’s something stronger than the difference between us and the Boss’s family,” she says. “God never put instincts into human beings — and sometimes I believe they are good as bad as they ever get — to have ’em hampered by social standing,” she says. “Listen to me, and don’t forget what I tell you right now. You’ve heard it before, but that makes no difference. What is good will win, Jim. The One who is running it all pays no attention to whether calling cards is engraved or printed,” she says, taking hold of my hand, “and is very busy with the matter of seeing that what I say is true. Sometimes He’s slow in getting around to lend a hand. It’s fair to say that. But don’t you ever make hints about them differences between us and anybody — don’t you make ’em ever again.”

And then I seen her face in the moonlight. You could see the anxiety on it as plain as bread on a white plate. "Katherine mustn't be going about like this if it isn't best for her," she says. "I hope she's home by this time. I'm going to let you talk to her. I think," she says, "that women learn about men from men," she says.

But it was when we got home and had got out our souvenirs and all them things that you bring home and then throw away the next day and said good night that we was most disturbed. Old Mrs. Byrnes had put the children to bed, and there she sat under the light of the lamp that was turned up too high, and the soot was rising to the ceiling, and there was a cup of cold tea beside her on the table and a lot of knitting in her lap, and her head had fallen over, and every time she took a breath in her sleep she'd let it out with a whistle that would make a dog think he was staying out too late. She was alone. Katherine hadn't come home!

Annie never said a word. She just looked up at the clock and woke the old lady, and they left me sitting alone.

Waiting for somebody ain't any fun, and less than that after night has come on. When I think of the women who sit and wait for men to come home, and I think how they try to read, and put the book down, and every chair is uncomfortable, and every sound outside is a disappointment, and the ears are straining, and the

noise they make themselves with a rustle of a dress or a sigh seems too loud, as if it was going to wake some evil, and trains whistle a long way off, and they think of a thousand things that may have happened, and look at the clock a thousand times, and hope that some good feller, as people call 'em, will come home, then I know very well that women ought to have all the pity. They ain't captains of their own ships. Of course some folks say it ain't necessary, and say it would be better for women not to bear with the troubles men cause 'em. But I don't say so. I say the evil and the pain of it is just a chance for women's loyalty and patience. It's better to have both than neither. I thought of it as I sat there.

It was midnight, and the moon had gone down behind the tops of the trees on the hill before I heard the wheels outside, and the carriage stopped, and the girl came in, running up the path, and pink with the cold.

"It's late," I says.

"We let the horse walk," says she. "It was so beautiful," she says.

"You didn't say anything to me or your mother about going," says I.

"Oh, no," she says, looking at the floor, with them long lashes of hers showing on her cheeks. "It was a secret."

I had hot words on my tongue then, but I rolled them around my teeth a bit. "A feller can ruin his own

daughter with a couple of sharp raps on her pride," I says to myself. "It's her ship, and she's got to invite me on board," I says to myself. "It won't do any good to try to knock a hole in the vessel. She'd only go to the bottom," I says to myself.

So I kinder smiled at her and wiped my glasses, and I says, "Will you tell me the next time? Will you let me in?" I says.

And she just nodded, and I seen the flush in her cheeks.

"Well," says I, wiping my glasses some harder, and looking at her eyes square and straight, "I want to ask you something, Katherine. You won't mind," I says, "because it's me. Has Bob Harvey — in these times you've been together — ever kissed you?" I says.

"No," she says, waving a good night to me at the door. "But sometimes I've wished he would," she says.

"Wait," says I, getting stern with her. "It's time to put an end to this."

She looked at me then, and her face was set hard all of a sudden. If she'd said the words with that expression, I wouldn't have worried so, but I seen her relax, and her eyes looked big and innocent and wondering, and her lips was open, and she seemed to be talking to herself. "Oh, no," she says. "You don't understand. It hasn't begun." And then she gives one of them little laughs of hers and says: "Let him ask for a kiss. They're mine. They cost me nothing, and they wouldn't cost him much."

It was that remark I didn't tell to Annie, and the one that kept me thinking like a man in the top story of a building that's afire. For I knew that of all the things a woman is wilful about it is them things she has to give away. And many a small and selfish woman gets credit for being good only because she's selfish. And by the same token many of the best of them are spend-thrifts through the bigness of their heart. And if it hadn't been for the Durn Fool maybe Katherine wouldn't have had the life she has. And besides, it was only through him that my girl and me understood each other again.

CHAPTER VII

THE Durn Fool was a strange contrivance. The first time we ever saw him was on a colored bill-poster, when a theatre company was coming to town. Fred Duvey, the "immitable comedian" of the J. K. Littlefield Sunlight Comedy Company, it said, though his real name was Fred Duffee. There are only about seven shows a year that play this town, and about three are "Uncle Tom's Cabin" companies, where all the fellers that sit in the front row bring meat to throw on the stage, and make the bloodhounds forget about the girl they're chasing. When a real singing and dancing show with a soubrette and comedian comes along, almost all of the two hundred hands in this factory pack into the town hall. It's better than a fire to break the monotony.

I remember exactly how that show pulled off. There weren't much to it except Fred Duvey, and he came out and says how he was going to attempt to amuse the audience without any coarseness like was common in variety acts nowadays, and he sang a song about a farmer who had a telephone put in his house, till everybody was holding their sides for laughing, and tears was rolling down Dave Pierson's cheeks, who's sort of noted for a long-faced disposition; and then he danced

a buck and wing, with every click of his shoes so prompt and certain it made you hold your knees and jiggle 'em, and after that he told some stories — not the kind of funny stories that slap you over the head, but sort of sly stories that had some of the men with beards giggling like a bunch of stitching-room sorters, and he went out, with the people in the audience laughing and clapping and slapping each other's knees and forgetting about the grocer's bill.

“He was sure a comical cuss,” says Arthur Ferris, going out of the hall; “but, say, wasn't the girl who sang ‘The Hills of Old Vermont’ sad and pretty, and sick and white?” he says.

“You're right,” says Teddy Donavan, who knew everything about everybody in town, from their face to the number of their watch. “That's his wife!”

Well, before the actors had got back to the hotel, the manager left town with the money and whatever stuff he could get together. It was just like the jokes you see in the funny papers. But you bet, I knew it weren't no joke to the Durn Fool.

He came into the factory next day after a job — came up to me as spry and chipper as a horsefly, with his wife behind, quiet and slim, and her hands folded in front, kind of patient. He was a sawed-off feller — too much of a fool to grow, as Peter Cross used to say — and fat, with red hair that looked like grass just after the lawn mower has been over it, except for the color.

“The Boss sent me to you, Mr. Hands,” he says. “Me and my wife want a job, for we’ve descended from the sublime artistic life in one night,” he says, “to the reality of sordid commerce, and we’re more bust than the liquor laws,” and with that he did a little breakdown on the wooden floor and struck an attitude which he said correctly represented Fred Duffee defying adversity. It made all the hands, who’d stopped their work and were standing pop-eyed like they do, holler with laughing. Then he reaches out and sort of pats her arm, and I could see his hands was shaky with the fear I’d turn him down. So I gave ’em a place. — That’s the way we get a lot of our labor, — green and fresh as a head of lettuce, — and there might have been something in the frail looks of the wife, a fear of the look of disappointment on a woman’s face that gives a whole man a scare worse than a six-shooter.

Duffee, the Durn Fool, never did nothing to earn more than a dollar a day, and did so much talking and chin music and fool-shines to stop the other hands at their work that it cost us about twelve dollars a week to have him in the room. That’s what the Boss said. But I says that he was just like one of them machines I was telling you about, — different from the rest, — comical and refreshing, and kept the men cheerful and lively and interested in the work, so he more than earned his money.

He was full of jimeracks and funny little ways, and

he could do a serious turn, too, sometimes during the noon hour, and the men used to get him to recite the old favorite, called "The Face on the Bar-room Floor," — all about a poor cuss in the grip of drink, — and another poem, too, about how a feller's father found the feller dying on the battle-field after the fighting was over, and Fred used to get down on one knee, side of a pile of scrap leather, and look at it so earnest and sad you'd begin to half think the thing was the old man's son. But he never got serious about himself, or, at least he never showed it — he was just a durn fool, and I guess he knew it. Even the day he sewed two fingers together on the machine he just laughed and said he hoped he hadn't broken anything, and that he felt "so-so," and then over he went, white and limp, like wet tissue-paper, and Gracie, his wife, coming with her little scream. She took his head in her lap, patting and fondling where the folds lay in his little fat neck, and whispering, "Fred, my Fred." But we knew she loved him some, you bet!

And she — well, she was the silent sort. Nobody ever could treat her brutal, I don't believe, she was that thin and patient. But it seemed kinder as if just being alive was brutal to her — as if some big hand you couldn't see was walloping her wherever she turned. It made me nervous to see how steady her head bent over the machine, and no laughing except once in a while when her husband, the Durn Fool, would come

up behind her chair and whisper some one of his funny cracks to her.

And he was an uncommon senseless feller. He never did the right thing, except when it come to doing a little jig step or cheering somebody up when they felt mean. There was a long while before any one in the factory knew there was a different side to Duffee, and when he didn't keep us laughing *with* him, we was always laughing *at* him for his durn fool mistakes. It was Duffee had loaned his last week's pay to Joe Carr, who'd skipped the town, or Duffee who had bought some shares in a gold-mine for thirty-five cents apiece.

Well I remember when Duffee seen an advertisement in the back of a picture paper saying how a feller in Battle Creek, Michigan, would tell you a sure way to get rich for twenty cents in stamps. All he sent Fred was a piece of paper, and written on it, "Fool other fools like I fooled you." And that summer, when the Durn Fool was wearing a straw hat with half a top to it, and the little wife had cut the cuffs off her best shirtwaist for the fringe that was hanging there, he come sneaking around to me.

"Jim," he says, polishing up a little shiny thing on his sleeve, "we live but once, and Napoleon Bonaparte ain't had a good time for over a hundred years, and as I was saying, I passed by the jeweller's window this morning, and there sat a little ring with a stone in it the color of that bit of sky yonder. Take a look at

the sky. And just four years ago to-day I was married to her, see? Well, I thinks she's been a sticker, good and bad, buttered side and bare side and no bread at all. She'd do anything for you, boy, I thinks to myself — even take in washing while you played the races, as they say in the song, and that's loving some. Give the best, says I to myself; they don't come more deserving. So I buys it — cost me the week's pay lacking a pile of pennies, and I've been sorry once or twice, for our assets daren't look our liabilities in the face. But, say, what do you think of the ring?"

He gave it to her all right behind the door of the stitching-room. I seen it, and seen how her face all lit up and then sobered down again, like when you pull down a bulkhead and shut the light out of a cellar, and she says, "How much did you pay for this, partner?" — it was her way to call him "partner." And he told her, but it weren't till he'd gone back to his machine that I seen the tears in her eyes and the cussed little ring wearing heavy on her finger.

There weren't any brains in his heart — that's what ailed the Durn Fool, and he had a thousand-dollar hand with a ten-cent pocket, as he said once himself.

I suppose none of us ever expected more of him than to hear his joking and breakdowns on the factory floor, and his laugh, — great guns! you should have heard that laugh, — there weren't nothing like it, and more'n one feller has spoken of how he's missed it since Fred

left us. We were half blind, I guess, not to notice, but toward fall the girl got so she couldn't stand the work, and we kind of half realized she was sick; but Fred still kept on with his whistling and imitations of Dutchmen and the Irish, and came down to the factory alone, and didn't eat any noon meal, so's to pay the doctor and keep 'em both alive, and so on.

Then there came the one time when I see the insides of the Durn Fool, the way you might see into a watch when the shiny back is pulled off it. It was a Sunday afternoon, just after the first heavy frost, when the valley and the hills were all streaked and spotted and laid out in colors as bright as a bedquilt, and the air was so clear you could see the crows hanging above the green strip of pine woods on Maple Hill so they looked like flies swooping around in front of your nose.

I was banking up the earth around the house, for these Northern winters sit heavy, and my Annie was inside pulling the kid's overcoats and things out of the newspapers and camphor, when along comes Fred Duffee, with his little legs a-moving. He weren't so fat then — life had bumped him some since he landed in town, but he was whistling, all right.

"It's a fine day, Jim," he says. "Does every hair on your head feel like a jews'-harp? I want you to take a walk with me — for a purpose," he says.

There was no refusing him. "Wait till I get my

coat," I says, and we went out the Dun's Road, with the frost-hardened gravel crackling under us, and the Durn Fool telling me how he dreaded the winter, being poor, and expecting to have to eat snowballs with maple syrup on 'em. I guess you could have heard his laugh clean across the pastures.

It weren't till we stopped to sit on the top rail of a fence, where you could look down and see the river widening out just above the factory, that I knew what he was after. I remember just as if it was now how I looked around at him. His face was all pulled down into lines, and his hands was plucking at his pants. Why, it looked like a sort of a skin had dropped off him — you'd never know it was him at all.

"Jim," he says, "I haven't got no hard-luck story, but I'm just bound to tell somebody I'm near crazy this time. I've laughed for near thirty years now, but part of it was a cussed sham, and now I'm up against the truth, and somehow I can't make any joke of it. It looks to you as if I never seen a sober thing, don't it? It looks to you as if all my mistakes, and so on, don't give no worry to me, and as if being up against it and putting a girl like Grace up against it ain't anything to me. It looks to you as if seeing the color fade out of her face, and she sticking like poultice and never a squeal, don't mean nothing to a feller like me. And what good am I, anyhow? What do I amount to?"

"Go on!" says I. "You're all right."

"All right?" says he. "As what? As a cussed jumping-jack — a clown — everybody's goat. That's what. And that's all, I guess, I'll ever be — a low comedian on life's stage," he says, and pulled his old felt hat down on his head. "Never amount to nothing."

"What ails you, man?" I says, jumping down and standing in front of him as he sat there on the top rail, all kind of battered-looking, like a wet bird. "You've got an off day."

"No, I ain't," he answers. "There's a new misery come to me. It was bad enough to take Grace away from her old man, but she came to me willing enough. I guess I was a cheerful cuss, and she was brought up among stern people and didn't know nothing about the world except duty and sewing and such things. She knows it now, all right! She's been a house plant set out in cold weather, you bet! Poor little girl. And her old man is a forbidding feller — he set his hand against her when she came with me," he says.

I was squirming then like a teased angworm — it was a great change from the laugh of the Durn Fool to that kind of talk. I'd rather have heard rattle-snakes.

"Oh, it's been a cup of bitters," he says. "She never says nothing — never a squeak, and it's got worse and worse. I'm just a chump. That's why I went

into the show business, and I couldn't seem to get along even at that, except before I married her. Don't you suppose she's sorry she ever got into it, Jim? I've layed awake nights to wonder about it. But that ain't nothing — there's more!"

"More?" says I. "What is it now — the cholera?"

"No," he says, never cracking a smile, "it's being a father."

"Great guns!" says I, thinking of the pay he was getting, and the stuffy little room they had up at Mrs. Riordan's lodging-house.

"It ain't the being up against it, Jim — it ain't only because I can't take care of 'em decent when the time comes," says he, "but it's me being a father! How can I show a kid the way when I never found it myself? He'll — I've always thought of its being a boy — he'll grow up to find me what I am, Jim," he says, "and I ain't got no purpose in the world. I don't know what they put me here for. And now they're going to make me have a boy. It's awful; it's too tough to be true."

I thought of the wife. "That ain't the way you talk to her, is it?" says I, anxious.

"No, no," he says, waving his hand like you'd make a swipe at a fly in the air; "I darsn't; she's too happy."

"And you're bust?" I asks. He grins some and looks at the places on his two knees, where what was

underneath showed through like two maps of Ireland. Then he jumped down, and we went home.

When we got to the house, I turned and looked at him, and so help me, it seemed to me he looked just like the Durn Fool again! "I hear Mellen, the undertaker, is doing such a poor business that he has sent his son away to learn to be a doctor," he says.

"Fred," says I, paying no attention, "come to me — you know — when you need me," and I jumped the fence to be rid of him.

It was warm inside with the smell of cooking, and I felt lucky for it all, and for my little Michael with his arms as fat as sausages, and everything.

My Annie had gone away for a day or two down to the Junction to do some shopping for the winter, and I found the girl in the kitchen arguing with the old lady Byrnes and trying to persuade her not to put rhubarb into a boiled dinner. And when Mrs. Byrnes went out mad and red from standing over the stove, something made me tell the whole story to Katherine.

"The poor girl, the poor girl," says she, never thinking of the Durn Fool's trouble at all, and catching at my sleeve. "And nobody but that Riordan woman with her. I'll go to her," she says.

And it come on to rain that afternoon, with the sting of the first touch of winter in the sleet, and it weren't till after dark that Katherine comes in through the door. There was water dripping off her, and her hat was all

askew with the wind, but she was fresh in the cheeks, and her mouth was in the curve that means something.

"Come into the kitchen where I can get a bit of warmth and dry feet," says she. "They ain't got nothing up there. We've got to make it out for 'em, somehow. But it's her father she wants to see — her father, who shut his door to her. He lives down at Potlake, — he's a farmer, — well off, too, I guess, and living alone since the other girl died. He don't know where this girl is. But you've got to go down there to-morrow and bring him up here, Dad, even if they dock you at the factory."

That's what she says, and I shied the job. "He won't listen to me," says I.

"He'll listen to me," she says. "I'll go," she says. "There ain't nobody that won't melt if the match is held right," says she.

"It's a crazy notion for a young girl," I says, but she had her way just the same.

I've had to laugh, though, about the way she said she felt on the train, and how she dreaded to walk up the steps of that house out on the road at the edge of Potlake.

That old man she'd gone to see was about six feet tall, for all the bend in his shoulders, and he had a beard and hair about the color of granite, trimmed up just close enough so's you could see the squareness of his jaw. I guess he never laughed. He was one of

these old fellers that are so sure they're right, you are more than half sure you're wrong — the kind of man who looks well in baggy pants, and wears eye-glasses with black rims. She says the inside of the house smelled musty, like old ledger-books smell. There was a globe of the world in the parlor, and a painting of a woman with one of these red coral neck-pieces, and pressed flowers framed and hanging on the wall, and a stuffed bird on top of a bookcase.

"How can I serve you?" says he, quiet and polite, just like that, but with a voice like the side of a house. She never made even a pass at returning his lead, and she says her tongue felt so fat she couldn't close her mouth. The old man was so different from Fred Duffee you'd hardly know they were two men.

"I've come to get you to go to your daughter Grace," says she. "She wants to see you." That burned the fuse down to the powder all right. The old man grabs the arms of his chair with his hands till the wood cracked, and he just looked at her till he was pop-eyed and red like a feller with the sunstroke.

"I've got no daughter Grace. A miserable play-actor has took her from me," he says, precise and frozen. "I won't listen to you — you hireling," he says, and in a minute more he was up on his feet walking this way and that, and turning back at the corners like a polar bear in a cage at the circus. "Tell me they're starving," he busts out again, "or perhaps he's

left her. That's what you come for; but I guess I know my duty, and I've done it when I seen it. There ain't no wrong done but what she's done. Who are you? Miss Hands? Well, Miss Hands, let me tell you I won't go back with you, not on this noon's train or this night's train or any train from now to eternity. The Lord gave me light on this matter, and you can't change me. I'm sorry for her suffering and her loneliness. She's had it. So have I. I'm a lonely man, but I ain't going to do any different from what I've done. There ain't any more to say, is they?" he says, stopping with his hands all in two knots and shaking.

"Just one, I guess," she says. "You're going to be a grandfather in a day or two — if you ain't already."

The old cuss looked at her with his mouth falling open and a kind of a scare in his eyes. A couple of times he made a pass at saying something, and then he sat down in his arm-chair, and his head kinder shook around to where he could look out the window down the stretch of white road with the elm trees lined up along the sides. She says it was near five minutes that he paid no more attention to her than the chair she was sitting in. And then by and by he crawls up, kinder feeble, and walks over to the table and opens up a big book with a mirror in the cover — a photograph album, I guess — and commences turning over the pictures. He stops once for a long while, and goes on turning the pages and stops again, and kept a-setting

the black-rimmed eye-glasses back on the red mark on his nose. Then he looks up at Katherine and walks across the room. "I'm getting a little mite stiff these days, young lady, — just help me with this overcoat. I'm going back with you," he says. It was just like some trees that won't blow down unless the wind is just right, and then up they come, roots and all.

So they come back on the three o'clock train. Katherine come after me, and it was near sunset when we climbed up by the factory to Mrs. Riordan's house. The old man had never cracked a smile or said a word all the way. Katherine and the old cuss went in, and I sorter realized that a heap had happened since I left town, and that it was all over but the shouting, and I ain't a great hand to mix up in no way with it. I just sat on a stone across the way with this very pipe I've got here in my hand now.

After a while Fred and the old man come out of the door — the old cuss a-wiping his specs on a blue bandanna and running his hand up through the places where the hair grew thickest. "The finest I ever see," he says, sitting down on the doorstep slow and careful.

For a bit the two of 'em sat there, and it was still and quiet through the valley, with the town down below, and smoke coming out of the chimneys where folks was getting dinner. Then Fred leaned over and says something to the old man, — just to try his hand on him, I guess, — I couldn't hear what it was. The

old feller — he give a shout that banged up against the hills and about cracked his old face with laughing, it had been set sour so long, and a-shaking himself and rubbing his knees. All of a sudden he sobered down, and he turned around and looked at Fred. "Never mind," says he, "I was right — you're the durndest fool I ever seen."

And then Katherine came out smiling and happy, and she came over to the rock where I was sitting, and sat down herself and looked off up the valley.

"Isn't it wonderful?" she says, after a while. And she didn't say anything more for several minutes.

But finally she put her hand on the edge of my coat and says, "Everything seems different to me after this day," she says. "I guess maybe I've learned something about fathers," she says.

"I hope," I says, "I ain't got a hawk nose like that one," I says, pointing with my thumb.

She smiled a little, and then she says: "Don't you worry about me, Dad. If there is badness in me, it's broken to harness," she says. "I've been thinking just now about the talk you had with me the evening I came back from the fair. I see it different now," she says. "This day has taught me a lot. You should see the baby's hands!" she says.

And then again she was looking off up the valley where them blue mountains are. "I guess you oughter know," she says. "It don't seem to be a thing I can

help very well," she says, looking at the ground. "I love him," she says.

"And has the Old Boss been told?" says I, a little shaky.

"There ain't anything to tell," she says.

"What! Doesn't the lad love you?" I says, with the words sticking all over my mouth.

She laughed then. "I wish," says she, "I wish I knew."

And the funny thing about it was that things shaped up in the week or two right after that so she could find out. It was just as if somebody had overheard what she said, and went to work to bring things around so that, by suffering a lot of pain, she could see.

CHAPTER VIII

I USED to think in them days that Katherine had some queer notions, and her friendship for Tommy Cutts was one of 'em. The time she was spending in them days to make over that little boy would surprise you. When he came to me, he claimed to be only fourteen years old, and yet he was the toughest piece of animal creation I have ever run across, from a Georgia wild cat to a Lake-front stevedore. The Old Boss is a big-hearted, steady-eyed business man from Massachusetts who always takes more on his shoulders and brains than any other three-meal-a-day man can carry, and then always makes a success out of all of it. But when he tried to make a Christian soul out of the Cutts boy, he ran into as sure a failure as if he had tried to tie a pair of white wings on to a snake, and turn it into a love-bird.

I remember it had been some time that last April when the Boss had called me down into the office to tell me the trouble was coming, and fill my ear with a song and dance about how some city institution was going to send him a boy whose parents were both serving long terms on account of what folks call impulsive

temperaments, and how he wanted to make a man of him and teach him a trade, and how the first principle was to give him good clothes and clean collars to raise his self-respect, and get him a nice room at Mrs. Rior-dan's. Of course I listened and nodded when he told me that the boy would work in my room; but I never have acquired much faith in schemes to make a bad egg fresh and sweet again.

The big thaw had set in, with the snow running down the hills to make the town a wallow of mud, and my disposition was sullen and soggy, like the weather, so, as I said, I just nodded and went back to work.

It certainly was a surprise to me when I saw the lad; he was thin and small and white, like a potato plant that has sprouted in the cellar, and had a soft, low voice. His eyes looked straight into yours, but they made you think he was going to cry any minute, until something excited him or caught his attention, and then they always made me think of the eyes of a cat that sees a bird out in the back yard.

"Tommy," says I, "the Boss is going to give you a snap, and my job is to give you some work. If you do the work I give you, the Boss will keep passing out the snap."

"Yes, sir," he answers respectfully. "I'll do it, mister."

"Do you like it here in the country?" says I.

He looked at me quickly. "Sure," he says. "They

had me dead to the world where I was. A feller can't be a sport there. Say, are there any bears in them woods — what?" And that's the way he'd talk.

For a week he worked hard, and the Boss was more pleased than if we had been shipping two hundred cases a day. He took the lad aside and told him he would give him a shot-gun and a fishing-rod if he did well. It surprised the old man some when Tommy reached into his hip pocket, pulled out a revolver, and said he thought it was old and didn't shoot straight, and he'd rather have a shot-gun, anyhow. The Boss told him to leave the revolver in the office, and to keep off the streets at night. I presume he thought the boy would learn vicious ways in the pool-room and on the street corners. It almost makes me laugh when I think of it, for young Cutts knew more badness than any one of the toughs in town had seen in dreams.

No one who was in the cutting-room the day that Thomas broke loose for the first time ever forgot it; as far as any of us are concerned, the boy became what you call immortal. Dave Pierson, who cut vamps, started for the stitching-room with his arms full of scrap pieces, and when he passed Tommy, who was working on a trimming-machine, the boy stepped back with one foot, and Dave sprawled his length on the floor. Some of the men thought it was done intentionally, but I never thought so, because it wasn't like the boy to pass out that kind of meanness. Anyhow, he looked down,

kinder surprised, and says, "Gee! I didn't mean to do that."

Dave cursed like a jail warden and, before he got up any farther than his knees, you could see he meant to take it out of the boy. I yelled to him to stop, but he was so mad he couldn't see. Then all of a sudden I heard the piping voice of that little puny rascal ringing out and dying back into his throat.

"I didn't mean to trip you, you dummy!" he says, "and if you touch me it'll be your finish!"

Two or three of those who had crowded over the benches laughed, because it was funny to hear such a frail youngster getting such big talk out of his system; then Dave caught Cutts across the face with his open hand, and Cutts went down. He crawled around a pile of skins quicker than a rat, and struck out for Dave's legs like a snake springs. The big man crumpled his body so the thin, reaching arms of the boy couldn't twine around him, and swung heavily with his right arm. The blow landed on the boy's neck, which lay open in a taut, white curve from his flannel shirt to the bristling short hair on the back of his neck, and then we were sure it was all done for Tommy Cutts. He lay over flat, with his arms limp on the boards, and his face all in a twist of pain.

I never saw a little lad look so much like an old man. "You've done it now, Dave," says I, with my tongue growing dry. "Somebody get some water. You stand

there like a pack of fools. Get water!" By that time the door of the stitching-room was full of girls, all pushing back and plucking at their lips with their fingers, now that everything had got so still and quiet. Some of the men looked pretty hard at big Pierson, so I grabbed a pattern mallet and motioned them back. Then all of a sudden I heard a yell behind me like the cry of a ferret.

Tommy Cutts had come up off the floor as if springs were under him, and he had climbed up big Pierson, reaching for his throat with his little hands. I've never seen fighting that could touch it, and in my young days I've been in many a teamster's mill myself. It was like the fuss that is let loose when a high-gear belting flies into strips and out of it come rattling growls of pain. We found out, a minute later, when the boy had Dave on the floor with his legs twined around him, and his fingers in the looseness of Dave's neck, which one of them had got the punishment.

It took three of us to get the boy loose. For a while I thought we'd need a derrick, but I had sense enough to reach for a fire-pail and dump the water on the boy.

It was a bad affair for the boy, for, although neither he nor Dave went to bed for it, yet it tightened up the lad's nerves to a wilder tune, and he got to pay less and less attention to work, and to look out the window more and more. Finally he skipped a day, and came back to town the next morning, wet and silent, like a

dog that has spent a rainy night from home. He never said anything to a living soul, except the little gang of the toughest boys who were trying hard to be as tough as he, and he talked to them like a section boss. I used to hear bits of news of what he was doing from the men in my room; but I never told the Boss, for I had heard him talk about the glory of making a man, and I knew he would know the blood of the boy all in good time.

There was another person besides the Boss who had a finger on Tommy, and, as I've said, that was my girl.

I never knew just how she got under the lad's hide, but it might have been because she was strong and healthy and liked outdoors and owned the only canoe the town had seen since the Indians, which she bought with money she made embroidering. Still, it would surprise you to see what kind of things the boy, who was naturally as tough as a man who eats wire nails, would do for her, — he'd walk right down through the main street in the town with a bunch of some kind of flowers for her, and that was more than any boy I ever knew would do for less than a hundred dollars. Sometimes, on Sunday, that summer, the two of them would go paddling up along the banks in the canoe. I used to wonder, once in a while, how he ever got the courage to do it, until I remembered that no one in forty miles had the courage to make fun of him.

I often bothered my head, when I was at work, and would look over at the stoop-shouldered rascal, to know

how just a girl had so much influence over him. Finally, one day, I asked him. I says to him, "Tommy, I've treated you pretty square, haven't I? I'd like to have you tell me why you like Katherine."

He looked at me kind of suspicious and wild, like a bird when you're getting near its nest.

"What's that to you?" says he. It was the first time he'd talked to me that way; but in a minute he turned aside from his work, leaned with his back against the bench, and then passed out more talk than I ever heard him do before, for he was the silent kind.

"She is the real thing," he says, "and she's on the level. No Sunday-school talk from her. Just straight goods. She listens to what I give her, and hands back a line that's kind of different. Now there's the Boss. He talks to me as if I didn't know twice as much as him, and he makes me tired. He's like them people in the city — dreaming. Look at those men around this room. What do they do? Nothing. Seven o'clock to work. Six back again — sleep and eat, see? What's that? I'd rather be a crook than that. See this collar I got on? The Boss makes me wear that, and what use is it? Ain't no use. I'll never get my face in the papers for wearing it." The lad crossed his thin white arms, and waited for an answer. I knew his mind well enough; it was the kind that grows like a weed grows when you haven't hoed the garden.

"She don't pass out no lectures," he went on. "She tells me things — see?"

I happened to think of the flowers, and I says, "I saw you Thursday," I says.

"With a bunch of asters," says he. "Sure! What for? Suppose you wanted a package of cigarettes, and I says to you, 'I'll bring you a package when I come in at one'; you says, 'Thanks.' Maybe you wants cigarettes, so I bring 'em to you — see? Maybe she wants asters — I bring 'em to her. That's all."

Still I hadn't found out what I had asked about, so I gave him the question direct enough. "Thomas," says I, "I guess you like Katherine because she treats you like a full-grown man —"

"Forget it!" says he. "That's the kind of fake the old man puts up to me. Nothing in that."

"Does she treat you like a kid?" says I.

"No! That's what you fellers would like to do. She makes me feel like Thomas Q. Cutts, fourteen years old — myself — me!"

I saw then, and I saw that my girl had more sense than any of us. There are some women like that — they see things I don't.

And it was only a few mornings after the Durn Fool's baby was born that the fun began. I've often wondered whether, if they'd left young Cutts alone with Katherine, how he'd have come out. I rather think he was doing better already when the trouble came.

Monday morning he slinked in, looking tired, like a hound that's been all day on a fox-trail, and with a red welt across his white face. About eleven o'clock a horse and buggy came over the hill in a cloud of dust. It was the sheriff, covered with sweat and mud. He came up the stairs two at a time, and into the room with a rush.

"Where's the Cutts boy?" he yells.

"Here I am, you shrimp!" came the same old piping shriek. "Take your hands off that pocket, or I'll blow you open." The lad was backed into a corner, with a big black revolver in his skinny little fist, and his eyes staring.

"They found out who did it," he says, with a grunt. "Then stand still, you suckers, for I'm going to clean out." The little rascal waved his gun around, and I guess we all ducked. His eyes were mighty prompt — looking from one to the other of us, and Gleason, the sheriff, standing with his hands up, in front of the packing-boxes. The lad had nearly got to the door when Dave Pierson saw his chance, and reached out from behind a cutting-block and banged the boy's wrist with a pattern mallet.

The gun went off as it flew out of his hands, and then there was smoke and yells and the screams of the women in the stitching-room. Tommy Cutts shot like a black shadow between the lines of machines, cursing at the top of his lungs. The sheriff headed him

off at the door, and before we could see what he was going to do, he had swung himself out one of the windows above the river, let himself hang for a second, and drop.

It was three stories to the river, and the water was shallow in places, with brown, slimy rocks poking up. But the boy had the luck of a devil, and when we looked out he was swimming with strong overhand strokes across the still place above the lower dam.

“Stop, or I’ll shoot,” yelled Gleason out of the window. The boy’s voice answered shrill and echoing from the trees.

“Gwan, you dope!” says he, dripping on the other bank.

Of course, then we were anxious enough to know what the lad had done, so Gleason sat down in a chair, mopping his fat old face, and told us they wanted the boy for an attempt to murder. He had been partridge shooting on the Knox Farm out on the East Road. It was Sunday, and all the Knox people had driven in to church except Knox himself, who was a hot-tempered old fool, and had caught the lad and cursed him for breaking the game-laws, and had taken him to the barn and horsewhipped him. I didn’t blame young Cutts, for I’d have done it myself, but the boy had seen his chance, grabbed an axe, and buried it clear through Knox’s collar-bone. Then he left Knox the way he somehow managed to leave all others who tried the weight of their hand upon him — spread out like an

empty meal-sack on the ground. Cutts had thought Knox was done for for good and all, and I believe he came to work confident that no one would ever find it out. But the farmer wasn't so badly hurt, and he came to and whined the whole story into the doctor's ears before the stitches were taken.

Heaven knows the law was slow enough in this fly-bitten settlement, but it was downright funny to see Gleason go out to chase after the little lad — it was no more use than setting a mouse-trap to catch mosquitoes. I watched him go over the hill again, and then went back to work. But I didn't feel good. I knew reform was all over for the Cutts boy, and although he was a bad product — well, there's no accounting for likes and dislikes, and Tommy had had a poor show from the first inning.

The Boss came up when the sheriff was gone. He was excited and hot. "Jim," says he to me, dodging my eyes, "I know now all about the trouble, and the boy was fooling me all along. I feel exceedingly bitter — exceedingly bitter!" he says.

That's what he said, and he had hardly gone when the office telephone rang, and they told me Katherine was waiting for me downstairs.

"Dad," says she, "what has become of Tommy?" Her eyes was big and earnest.

"The last I saw of him, he'd just landed on the other side of the river," I says.

"It's a shame," she says. "If I could only see him! I heard about it all, and came down here. He acted in self-defence — that's the law. If I could speak to him, he would give himself up — he would do what I tell him."

"Girl," says I, "it isn't the boy, it's the blood of his mother and his grandmother that's ailing him. Do you mind that?"

"Oh, that's an easy way to convict him," she says, with her head thrown back. "You expect to treat the boy as if he were cut out of different material from us. And then, when you fail, you give him up the way you'd give away a dog because he's snapped at a neighbor who has kicked him!"

Her eyes had fire in 'em, but it took me several minutes after she'd gone to admit to myself she was right.

And then, during the next few days, came the big fall rainstorm. There were lots of water, and the river swelled fatter and fatter, and Friday morning the dam above the Crocker Mill went out. It was wild weather, and I couldn't help feeling sorry for the little lad who must have been hiding somewhere in the woods, like a beast without a home.

About the time we were shutting up for the night, on Saturday, Mrs. Barker's little boy came running up along the river-bank, shouting for help.

"Somebody's drowning," he yells. Most of the men

pulled their hats over their ears and went into the teeth of the storm, along the river-bank.

The rain was cutting down and stinging like a wasp, and filled your eyes so that everything looked like it does when you get a crack on the head. The river was writhing like a snake on a stove; way out in the middle we could see a white and black patch wedged in between two boulders. It was a human being, all right, but I'll be blest if you could tell whether it was a man, woman, or Baptist, in that storm.

"Who is it?" says I to the Barker boy, who was standing scared and still at my heels.

"I don't know," says he. "I seen her fall in when she was trying to catch a canoe that had broke loose."

"Here, get a rope!" I yells, trying to think what I would do with it when it came, for no man would dare risk his life on a journey out to the middle of that boiling current. The girl out there turned her head once, and gave a scream that you could hear for all the rush of water and wind. "It's all over," thinks I. And then I heard a voice behind me in a high, rattling scream. "Give me that rope, you lobster! That girl is my pal!" It was Tommy Cutts.

Before we caught on to the trick, the boy had taken a half hitch beneath his armpits, and was wading out in the broth, a hundred feet up the stream. We held the other end of the rope, more because he had told us to than because of any sense we had. In a couple of

seconds the rascal was in the current, with his legs and arms reaching around and clawing the water.

"He'll miss her," hollers one man. "Sure death!" whispers another.

"What girl is it?" I says. "She's done for," I says. But the luck of a devil was on the boy — he landed against the outside boulder with a crunch, only you couldn't hear it, and he was reaching for the girl with his little hands. There was no use — the nerves of a man had to let loose, and we gave a yell when we seen he had made the loose end of the rope fast around her body. We pulled them in, each one of them knowing as much as another — nothing! And the woman was lying face down for a second, all limp like an empty sack, with her hair all wet and covering her neck, and trickles of blood on her hands. I turned her over myself, and it was my girl!

I could hear the blood pounding in my head as I looked at her. She was so white and lay so still. But it was only a second. Then she opened her eyes and caught up a breath, and I seen her lungs fill, and I knew she was still alive. And then I saw Charlie Ward, the doctor, who had stopped his buggy down there by the bridge and come running, and I heard him say, "Well, is the boy alive, too?"

So I looked behind me, and I seen there was a soft, red place on the boy's forehead. The doctor said he might pull through all right. I was told that they

carried him, neck and heels, and all sagging between, up to the Thorntons' house, and they stretched him out on a sheet no whiter than he, and the doctor says, "He'll be up in a few days. That kind of lad is hard to put away." But the boy went a long way past that.

Of course I went with my girl. My Annie had come home that day, and it was a shock to her when we brought Katherine up to the back door with the light gone from her skin and them brown eyes turned the color of lead.

We didn't know then that she would be in a fever before the night was over, and what we would have to bear. I can see her now lying on the bed in the front room. I remember it was still raining, with a lot of wind rattling the blinds, and water slapping on the windows, and Annie holding the lamp and the wet clothes scattered on the floor. But Katherine opened her eyes and give a little smile and says, "I'm all right," as if she was waking out of a dream, and then she started up once and says, "Tommy Cutts! How is he?" So I told her he was all right, and she smiled again and says, "Don't let them arrest him," she says, and dropped back sort of weak, the way a toy balloon acts when there's a leak in it.

It was near nine o'clock when the knock came. I knew it weren't the doctor, for I'd left him upstairs looking at one of them miserable little thermometers and shaking his head, with my Annie and little Michael

watching him with both their eyes as big as buttons on an overcoat. When I opened the front door, there was a young feller dripping with water, and kinder white. And I seen it was Bob Harvey.

"I just heard about the accident," he says. "How is she, Mr. Hands? I had to come. You don't understand. Maybe she won't understand, either. I guess she won't. I've got to see her."

Right then I heard the doctor's voice as Annie was letting him out the back door on to the driveway. "I'll be back in an hour," says the voice. "You asked if there was danger, and I'm going to be honest with you, — there is some danger." I remember them words was like hatpins running into a feller's ears, and I found I had my hand grabbing young Harvey's arm, and his hand was on my wrist. I could feel them fingers. He must have had muscles like strips of rawhide.

"I've got to see her," he says, breathing hard. "I can't tell you any more. I've got to see her! Do you hear me?" He pulled me over under the light, and moved close to me and looked square into my eyes.

"Do you understand?" he says.

"Go on up," says I.

So I followed him up the stairs, and we went in. He went right over to her. Her eyes were half open, and she smiled again, and her hand kind of crept out, with her fingers moving.

"Bob!" she whispers.

"You ain't going to die!" says he. "You listen to me, Katherine," he says. "You will fight!" and he took hold of her hand and bent down and shut his teeth with that same look I seen once before on his face when he was a boy and was hurt playing football and got up and shook his head.

It was strange. It was just as if he had some kind of strength he could give to her. You could almost think the blood was running through his lips into her hand. You could almost think you saw the color come back into her cheeks. And she even moved and looked at her hand pressed against his cheek, as if it was something she wanted to see.

"I didn't know you liked me," she whispers, and smiled a little.

"Like you?" he says, without paying any attention to me. "Like you? Why, girl, I love you," he says.

And with that she moved her hand and touched his hair, kind of gentle, and then there was a second of woman's devilment in her face, and she said, "I don't know exactly what I'm going to do with you," she says; and she give a happy little sigh and went into a sleep again, with her lips moving, and that dark red hair of hers all around her head on the white pillow, and the wind howling away outside and rattling the blinds.

The boy got up then. He looked at Annie, who had come in with some medicine on a tray, and he looked at me, but he didn't say anything. He just went away.

He just went down the stairs, and I heard the door shut, and I looked out the window and seen the feller rushing out of sight through the storm.

He came back the next morning. Katherine had been worse. I had figured I ought to go to find out something about Tommy Cutts, and I seen Bob Harvey going in as I went out from the barn driveway. I had a heavy lump of feeling in me. Something told me Katherine wasn't going to live.

When I got down to the Thorntons', where they'd taken the Cutts boy, I found the Old Boss was there. Tommy was sitting up on one of them tough elbows of his, and looking at the Boss with eyes shining like rats' eyes.

"I've been to the bad and I've just come out of it," he says. "Tell me straight," he says to the Boss, "was it her finish?"

"No," says the old man. "I guess not."

"Well, then," says the boy, "why don't you thank me?" he says. "They can go on and maybe get married or something," he says.

I guess the Boss thought the boy was still out of his head. "Who?" he says, with half a smile.

"Why, the girl and your son," says Tommy. "It's an awful case," he says. "The lady was a friend of mine, anyway," he says, with a grin, "and your son ain't so bad, and I wouldn't knock him, anyway. I promised her I wouldn't — see?"

I seen the surprise in the Boss's eyes. I seen him shut his two fists and kind of bite his lips under that gray mustache of his. But he only said, "I'm coming to see you again, young man," he says. "You did something mighty good, after all," he says, and smiled at the two of us and went out.

But he didn't see Tommy Cutts again. For the next morning, when Mrs. Thornton went in to look at him at six o'clock, he had gone, and so had ten dollars in the sitting-room desk and a revolver, too.

The news was around town before breakfast on Sunday, and fifty men and boys went out to look for the lad — not so much because of the ten dollars as because the doctor said he would die in the woods.

It was funny that I should have been the one to have found him. He was sneaking along the stone wall in Parker Dun's pasture. When he saw me, he started for the woods like a traileed fox, and I nearly did myself out of my lungs chasing him. When he had got near the edge of the woods, he turned on me.

"Come back, you fool," I yelled.

"You want to put me in the cooler," he screamed. "If you come any nearer, I'll blow your head off." He had the gun well enough, and I still had a good many years to live.

He turned slowly, looking over his shoulder, and limped into the woods. He was the toughest human creature I ever saw. I remember how blue

his eyes looked, and how his thin shoulders slanted down.

They told me that there were fifty miles of timber land before you get to so much as another lumber camp. They said that no boy or man could get out of the place alive, and yet I'd bet my salary — and I get a good one now — that Tommy Cutts did it. He had more lives than a litter of kittens.

CHAPTER IX

SOMETIMES a feller don't know how to move, and so he don't move. And in all them days when Katherine was getting well, and the Boss's son was coming to see her, I never told anybody, not even my Annie, that the Boss knew; and he never said anything to me, and it was hanging over us all.

The Old Boss is pretty human. He has his tender side, so to speak, and his hard side, and in them weeks that followed there was one girl that showed up the first and another showed up the second.

One day the Boss sent for me to come to his office. He met me just outside with his hand on the knob. He's an ugly, good-hearted old bear in business hours, with his gray hair all mussed up and his clothes all baggy, just as if he was as poor as one of them yellow-headed Finns who tack heels in the basement.

"Jim," says he, "talk quick! You said you'd like to get a girl to paste linings," he says. "Do you still want one?"

"I do," says I, "if I can get one who won't always be grinning and laughing like the last one," I says — "that freckle-faced Casey girl," I says.

With that the Boss let his face slide to a smile.

"Here's one in my office," he says, "that looks as if she wouldn't laugh for a hundred dollars. And she ain't got freckles. Take a look at her and see if she'll suit yer," he says.

So with that I walked into the office, and at first I scarcely noticed her. She was one of these people that fades into the landscape of a room like them lizards that change color. You've seen that kind. 'Tis hard to pay more attention to 'em than to the gas-bracket on the wall or the pattern on the carpet.

"Miss Jennie Lyons," says the Boss, and with that I heard one of them little "Oh, my's!" that sounds as if it come out of somebody you'd have to see under a microscope, or whatever yer call it. And when I turned I seen she was kinder small. It weren't her size so much, but she made me think of a mouse in a trap, scared and begging on its hind legs, and maybe she was twenty-two years old.

We'd had that stretch of rain, and the little thing was wet, and everything drooped and clung around her, and there was a couple of wet sprouts of hair sticking down on her cheeks kinder like a picture-frame for her solemn, big-eyed little face.

Something inside of me says, "Jim Hands, she's no good, and you know it, but you'll hire her just the same."

"Have yer had experience cutting?" I says.

She looks at me, and her under lip commences to flip-flip like my little John's when I speak cross to him.

"Have ye?" says I again.

"Oh, no, sir!" says she, so soft yer could hardly know whether she was talking or licking her lips.

"What's been your experience?" I says.

"General housework," says she, and I seen the Boss's thick nose wrinkle up like the front of a wash-board.

"That'll be useful," says I.

"Yes, sir," she says, with her little mouth open, and them big, round, brown eyes still looking at me as surprised as if my face was a moving-picture show. "Yes, sir," she says, "and I was a waitress over at the summer hotel at the Springs, but I weren't strong enough for the work," she says. "And I wrote a letter to my Aunt Abbie, for she's all the folks I got, and asked her if I might come home; and she wrote ter me and told me to get a job in a factory."

I felt then that I had small chance of heaven if I turned her down. But I tried to think of a way to tell her that she wouldn't do. It stuck in my throat like a fishbone. So I says, "Come down here at eight to-morrow," I says, and out she went like somebody who's heard bad news.

The Boss looks up at me and brings his thick fist down on the papers on his desk.

"Jim," says he, "I make it a rule to have no sentiment in business," says he. "We didn't want her. I knew she wouldn't do, the moment I laid my eyes on her. She ain't fitted fer industrial life," says he.

"Hereafter, follow my rule," he says: "No sentiment in business. I knew she weren't any good, the minute I seen her."

"But yer sent for me to talk with her," I says.

He ran his finger around his collar and got red and coughed and moved his feet. "Did I?" he says. "Well, I thought you'd have enough backbone to turn her down," says he. "No sentiment in business," he says. "If she don't make out with the work, fire her," says he, growling. "Send her down to me."

"All right, sir," says I, not wishing to say more; and the next morning Jennie come in a half hour late. She looks around the room with her big eyes and pretty, pale face, and backed over to a cutting-bench where I had sorted out an armful of the patterns, which took me an hour, and she leans on the board before I could stop her, and the whole business comes down on to the floor, all sizes and shapes mixed up together, and noise enough to make a snail jump through a barrel-hoop.

"Oh!" says she, crouching down as if somebody was going to hit her. "Ain't that like me?" she says.

"I couldn't say," says I. "Not yet. Yer made a good beginning by being late the first morning."

And with that her lips begins to go flip-flip, and when she'd hung up her things in the coat-room and come out, I seen her eyes was red and her little hands was shaking.

"Your job is simple," says I. "Take these linings,"

I says, "and paste glue on one side of 'em," I says. "Here's a bell, and the boy will come in from the stitching-room for 'em when you've got a lot done," says I.

It weren't ten minutes after that the bell rang, and when I went to see I finds she's pasted only three! The next time she'd done a case of them, but they were all on the wrong side — rights and lefts mixed up. So it went, and when the day come to an end she run like a mouse after her little black coat. But the next morning in comes Jennie Lyons a good hour late again, and with her she brought one of them little white and black cur dogs that yer see hanging around the alley back of the town hall; and he was so thin you could almost see the grain of the wood through him when he'd lie down on the floor, and now and then he'd look around the room and let out one of them forsaken yelps of his that sounded like disease and death.

"Oh, Mr. Hands," says Jennie, with her brown eyes as big as saucers and all out of breath. "He followed me all the way down," she says. "Poor little thing," she says. "Half starved," she says. "Listen to him cry! And I'm going out now to get him something to eat, and bring him and put him under the bench by the glue-heater," says she. "He can come to work with me every day," says she.

"Dogs ain't allowed in the factory," I says, thinking of the Boss's words. "We want no sentiment in business!" I says, kinder sharp.

With that the dog sticks his pointed face up at me, with his loose, moth-eaten ears drooping over, and lets out one of his whoops. And Jennie looks at me and then at the dog, and I seen her under lip droop down and begin to flip-flip again. It made a man feel kinder like a graveyard in a thunderstorm. I seen her big eyes getting watery, and she drew a breath and let it loose in instalments, like it hurt her chest to let go of it.

“Oh, well,” says I, weak and foolish. “There’s a ham sandwich in the paper up there on that shelf,” I says. “’Twas intended for me, but give it to the little dog,” says I, “and say no more about it,” I says.

I thought to myself that, once fed, the ratty little beast would run away from her; but it weren’t so. He stuck to her like a burr on a woollen stocking, with his little sore eyes and his sniffles and scratching himself. She couldn’t do her work for watching him and patting his head and throwing everything inter a panic when somebody’d trip over him and start him yipping and screaming around the big room till your ear-drums would think that ten fleas was having Virginia reel upon them.

On Thursday of that week Jennie turned over the whole pot of glue. It was enough to make a saint eat his halo, for of all the sticky, slow-moving stuff, that paste will make an honorable mention and walk away with a prize for smell! But, as luck would have it, the blooming pup — Cæsar, she’d called him — was lying asleep at her feet, and all of the hot stuff spilled on him.

He opened his face and let out a yelp that nearly pushed out the winder. And with that he started out of the puddle, streaking it over the piles of sheepskin, with a blanket of glue dragging out as he went, doing damage to leather at the rate of about ten dollars a yard and cutting his circles around the room in a way to surprise yer for a dog of his size. I'll never ferget seeing the girl watching him go, with never a word, and her soft eyes frightened and staring.

On the fourth time around Cæsar made up his mind it was time to stop and think, and he chose a box of thread belonging to the stitching-room to sit in. With his fore feet he tried to wipe the stuff out of his eyes, and then he looks at me and lets out another sticky yelp.

"Talk is cheap, old scout," says Dave Pierson, addressing the cur. "And you'd better keep moving while yer can move," he says. "For I'm thinking of making a tobacco-pouch of your hide," he says, "ter remind me of what yer just did to the back of my pants' legs when yer passed me by," he says.

And it seemed as if the dog understood him all right, for he started off again, rubbing up against every corner and anything he could lean against to take off the glue. You know how a dog does. And every now and then, even after all this time, I still find sticky places around the room where he scraped himself.

"'Twould be a blessing if he'd find the door," says Eddie Murphy, "for, ter tell the truth," says he, "this

room, large as it is, seems six feet by six with him in it," he says, and with that the dog goes by him, and he looks up to be sure Jennie didn't see him, and he lifts the beast with his foot out into the hallway. "And now look at them fancy socks of mine!" says he.

Well, you that have never been foreman of a room knows nothing of the way a riot like that will break up the work. Glue was everywhere! Seven men was in the wash-room, scrubbing it off their clothes. Tommy Cutts stepped in a puddle of it and tracked it into the stitching department. The doorway was crowded with the girls that had left their machines to see what was going on. My own fingers was webbed with it like a duck's foot. Somehow, it got between the pages of my stock-book, and a week after that I couldn't get to the records with a steel crowbar. So it goes.

But it didn't take me a week to get mad. I could feel the hair on the back of my neck crawl up and down my collar! "Ho! ho!" says I to myself. "When the whistle blows, Jennie Lyons, — big sad eyes or no eyes, — you will get yours all right! You fool," says I to myself, "you oughter been ashamed to hire a girl for pity," says I. "You oughter fired her every day since she's been here. She ain't earned the interest on a shortage," says I. "To-night I'll show her!" I says. "She can look like a lonesome mouse, and no good will it do her," I says. "Chuck! and out she goes. Business is business," I says.

I worked the rest of the afternoon thinking of it. "Don't make any mistakes now," I says, talking to myself as I cut out a sample vamp. "Don't listen to none of her talk. Fire her and walk away!" I says. And later on, I remember, I went to the end of the room, and I see the town-hall clock said quarter to five. "Walk right up to her now," I says to myself again. "Don't botch the job," I says, and I went back to wait for the machinery to shut down.

By and by the whistle blew, and I looked around. I seen Jennie was busy cleaning up, with that slim little body and big, round, scared eyes of hers, and I seen that the others had mostly gone, so I draws myself up and walks over to where she was standing.

"Jennie," says I, "you needn't come back to-morrow," I says. "I don't think you'll do. Stop in the office and get your pay," I says.

Well, sir, she never says a word! She just looks at me, with her face getting whiter and something like the look of an old horse that you've shot in the forehead. "That's all," says I, and walks away.

After a bit the power was turned off, and the shafting eases up and stops with a sigh that always makes me think it's glad for the night's rest. It was pretty still in the room, and getting kinder dark.

I remember I could see the clouds streaked along the ridge across the river where the sky was lightest, and there was frost coming on the winders. I was under

a lamp I'd lit and checking up the piece-work, and all of a sudden I hears a little noise behind me, way down the room. "Sh-sh-gug-gug-ooh," it sounded. I looks up, and I seen that Jennie hadn't gone yet. I seen her little white face through the dark as if it had been rubbed with phosphorus.

With that I closed up my bench-desk and walked down toward her. She was sobbing, all right. She shook with 'em.

"Whatcher waiting for?" I says. But I made a big mistake by speaking. Not that she answered, for she never peeped, but just flung herself forward on the bench and begins to cry kinder soft; and every now and then she'd catch a breath, and you could see by the raising of her-little shoulders when she'd caught a long one.

"Flif-flif-flif," she went. You know how it sounds when a woman's crying. Between you and me, I'd rather have 'em come back at me with a lot of good four-ply, full-mouthed tongue-lashing or fling a flat-iron. This flif-flif-flif business is a foolish sketch. It makes me feel as cheerful as one of them rosettes of black crape they hang on a door. You know how yer shift yer feet and wonder what you're going to do about it, and whether what you'll say will make it worse or better; and your collar shrinks about three sizes, and you've got your choice whether to rip out a oath or two and make it worse, or whether ter try reason, which you know ain't any good.

Well, I stood there, and it was soft at first, but it was getting louder, with a worrying sound in it.

"Whatcher crying for, Jennie?" I says, soft and pleasant. "Don't cry," I says; "cut it out!" I says, getting mad. "What's the matter with yer?" says I.

With that she raised her head, and I seen them big scared eyes of hers with them long lashes was full of water, and it was dripping from her little chin.

"I'm fired," she says, with some more of them sobs of hers. "O dear me!" she says, as if I wasn't there. "Mr. Hands has fired me," she says, "and my poor little dog," she says. "I've been fired!" And then some more of that "flif-flif-flif."

I looked up at the ceiling and at the floor and out of the winder. "Maybe," I thinks, "I was harsh with her," says I, lying to myself and knowing it. And I looked at her again, and she'd spread her face and hands down on the bench again.

"For the love of peace, shut up!" I says. "Come back to work to-morrow," says I. "I haven't any more time to talk with you," says I, very stern. "Business is business."

And so it come about that she was back the same as ever, — to my shame be it said, — and she brought the peaked little dog with her, and a new little red collar on his neck; and he went smelling around, suspicious and whining, on the trail of the glue, and stopping now and then to scratch and look up at me with his red, watery eyes.

I knew the trouble had got to come again, and I went inter training for it. I don't know what my men thought of me, I was that short with them. I was practising cold blood, though, and every day Jennie was getting worse and worse — with her work half done and her pasting clippings of poetry from newspapers on the post in front of her bench and talking soft and shy to the dog. We'd have been getting out of the deal cheap to have paid her the wages and told her to stay at home and pray for more orders.

But one morning in walks the Boss. When he comes upstairs like that I can tell in a minute whether he's feeling fine or going to raise a rumpus, for if everything's good he'll stop in the door and scratch his head and look around, but if it's the other way, he'll walk right in, very fast for his age, and with one eye shut and rubbing his ear with his hand. This time I knew something was the matter.

"Jim," says he, "I see by the report you have a lot of damaged vamps. Who did it?" says he.

"Jennie Lyons," says I.

"That mouse of a girl we hired in November?" says he. "Is she any good?" says he.

"No," says I.

"Why don't you fire her?" says he.

"Oh, well," says I, "I tried it once, and I'll try it again," says I. "She's a little thing," I says.

The Boss was mad. "Jim," he says, "this ain't your

factory to do as yer please with it. Your duty is to see that what's under you is run to the best advantage at most any cost. You know I don't want anybody to do anything dishonest, but duty is duty. And another thing," he says, "I hate to see a man that's been in factories most of his life get soft and mushy. We ain't running a home for orphans! Remember what I said to yer before," says he. "No sentiment!"

"I'll fire her," says I.

"I wouldn't trust yer to do it," he says. "Send her down to me at the noon hour," he says. "I'll do it myself," he says, and walks away.

Of course I wasn't going to have any trouble if I could help it. No more of that flif-flif-flif and water for me! So I planned never to say anything to her until she was ready to go to dinner. But she got away before I knew it, and I just caught her at the entrance to the offices.

"Jennie," says I, "the Boss wants to see yer in his office."

"Oh, I know," she says, with her little voice. "He's going to fire me!" And I thought she was going to start sobbing.

"Walk right in," says I. "I have nothing to do with it," I says. "Go right in and sit down. He's in the sole-leather room, and he'll be right up," I says.

Pretty soon the Boss comes up from the basement and sees me. "Jim," says he, "where's that no-good girl that's come down for her time?"

"In there," says I, "sitting in your office."

"She knows what I'm going to say to her, I suppose," he says.

"From what I can guess, she's next!" says I.

With that the Boss leaned forward so's he could look down toward the bookkeeper's desk and into his own office. "Great Scott," says he, "she's got her handkerchief out! Confound the luck!" he says. "She's crying!" he says.

"Are you sure?" says I, grinning.

"Thunder—yes," he says. "Well, ain't she any good at all?" says he, pulling at the short hair above his ear.

"None at all," says I.

"None at all?" he says. "Well, what should we do in a case like this?" he says.

I never answered, but just pulled open my knife and whittles a match with it.

"Oh, well," says he, "I'll just explain to her that we can't use her," he says. "Those that can't earn their pay must go. That answer is easy," says he, and he pulls down his vest and walks in.

On the way back after dinner, and when I got down by Mrs. Jordan's boarding-house, I was paying a good deal of attention to places to put my feet down, and it weren't till I got to the rise that I looked up, and then, just as sure as I'm sitting here, I seen Jennie Lyons carrying the measly dog under her arm and just going in the factory door.

She weren't in my room when I got up there, so it was a big load off my chest; and it weren't till I started down the stairs that night and looked in at the lasters' room, where Ben Joline is foreman, that I seen what had become of her. For there she was, cleaning lasts, and the dog at her little feet inter the bargain!

Ben Joline is dead now. You never knew him, but it took a big, rough old fellow to handle them Finns and Canucks and jailbirds that we always seemed to get on the lasters' bench. He was one of the kind that shaves in the morning and has a bristling beard by noon; and his neck was as big around as a boy's body, and red. Then he was marked with smallpox, and until he got inter this business he had been boss of gangs of longshoremen on the Lakes. And he had a voice that would bust the big pipe on a church organ, and was a very rough talker and strict with his men. When I seen him standing there, and the thin, mousy girl sitting there, too, it made me think of the way they feed live rabbits to the lion in the circus.

I met the Boss at the foot of the stairs with his hat on, going out.

"Did yer fire the girl?" I says.

"Jim," says he, waving his hand, "I'm just going out in a big hurry. Unless you want me for something important, you'll have to wait for another time," he says.

And I guess it was three or four days after that when

Joline come up at about five and walks up to me, hitching up his trousers front and back, as he learned sailoring. "Jim," says he, with a whisper that sounded like a train going over a bridge, "did that Jennie Lyons work for you?"

"Yes," I says.

"Weren't any good, was she?" says he.

"No," says I.

"Why didn't you give her the sack?" he says.

"What's that to you?" says I.

"Ho! ho!" he says, "you old rascal, you!" he says.

"I bet I know."

"You tried it, too?" I asked.

"Sh-sh," says he, slapping me on the back with his big hand, "don't say a word! I've sacked a couple o' thousand men in my day. And the Boss told me if she weren't any good, to tell her to go. Well, she ain't any good—you know that," he says. "And that sick pup of hers!" he says.

"Well," says I, "you've fired her?"

"Sure," he says. "I fired her, and now what's best to do next?" he says.

I laughed at him and says, says I, "Well, you know she ain't got any folks or anybody to love her but that sore-eyed dog," says I, "and I hardly know what she'd do up here in the winter without work," I says. "But then," I says, "we oughter have no sentiment about business matters," says I.

"Before you go on trying to throw your joking at me," says he, "wait till I tell yer what I done," he says. "I found out that Joe Bent down in the packing-room was short of somebody to sort sizes, so I offered her to him, and darn me, he took her!"

"He didn't know?" says I.

"Not a word," says he. "She's going to start in to-morrow;] and if you say anything to him, I'll choke yer ter death."

"It's a mean trick," says I.

"On Joe?" he asks.

"No, on the little girl," I says. For I was thinking of Bent and his ways. I always kinder disliked Joe. He was one of these young fellers that is tall and so straight it seems to hurt him, and he never makes no mistakes and keeps a diary and thinks he's got trouble with his stomach, and so far as I could see he had about as much feeling for anybody else as I've got for that board there on the floor. He was always sniffing and sniffing and always done his duty, and had so much modesty that he'd try to show how modest he was every chance he got. And cold-blooded! He was about as human as a plaster-paris model of a cake of ice.

As I was saying, I says to Ben Joline, "It's a mean trick on the girl."

"Oh, yes," says he, "but you know Joe. He hates all women-folks, anyway; and when he makes up his mind, he's good for action. He never has any use for

girls. He'll get pleasure out of sacking Jennie. The boss knows it, too. She's as good as gone. She could cry aloud on the floor and he'd freeze it for her," says he. "He's a woman-hater, he is," and with that he slaps me on the back again as if he'd just had money left him, and walks off.

It was as much as four weeks after that I went down to the office to talk about a new lot of upper leather with the Boss, and we argues for a while, and I remember I says to him at last, "Well, anyhow, the cheaper product cuts best for economy," I says.

"And, by the way," I says, "I understand Jennie Lyons was working for Joe Bent in the packing-room. Of course you know it," I says.

"Yes, I did," says the Old Boss, looking at me kinder suspicious.

"She *was* working for him," says I.

"Was?" says he. "Did he fire her?"

"He did," says I, and I pulls a cigar out of my pocket and holds it up. "How's that?" says I.

"The cigar?" he says. "Where'd you get it?"

"You've just come in," I says, "so you don't know. Joe Bent gave it to me."

"Great guns!" says the old man. "I never knew Joe ever gave away a cigar in his life."

"Why," says I, "he passed 'em around to everybody this morning."

"For what?" he says.

"For discharging Jennie," says I. "He's fixed it so she won't work here no more."

"Had the backbone! I knew it," says the Boss. "No sentiment for him! She's through."

"Yep," says I, "last night he married her."

"Happy days!" yells the Old Boss, and slid down in his desk chair. "How did it happen?"

"Well," says I, "they say he told her she wouldn't do, and she began to cry; and by and by he put his arm around them little shoulders of hers, and then, of course —"

"Well, I'll be thundered!" says the Boss. "You and Joline, the tough old nut that he is, and cold-blooded Joe Bent! Not one of you with the nerve! So far as I can find out, a little woman's weeping is an awful weapon," he says.

"And what about you?" says I. "You tried."

"Me?" says the old man. "Oh, I don't count. I'm a damn fool about those things, anyway."

And yet it was kinder funny that he looked up at me then for a minute or two and felt around with his fingers until he reached the calendar on his desk with the sheet on it about six or eight weeks behind and tore off a piece of it and crumpled it up and threw it in the waste-basket, but never stopped looking at me. He didn't look very happy, I thought. He looked like somebody going to say good-by to an old friend or the like of that.

“Jim,” he says, by and by, with a different voice, “I want to see you this noon hour,” he says. “I’ve got something to talk over with you. Do you go home these days to dinner?” he says.

“No,” says I. “Katherine is on her feet again, and now that we’re so loaded up with orders,” I says, “and I can’t spare the time, she fixes something up for me and brings it down,” I says, and he nodded and called the stenographer.

CHAPTER X

So it was at the noon hour that the business came to a head, and sometimes when I look back on it, it seems to me as if things was falling all together and joining one thing to the other to make a new pattern out of life.

I suspected what the Old Boss had on his mind, and when I went down into his office, I seen there was still a smile in his eyes, but none on his mouth.

"Jim," he says, "sit down. You know me," he says. "You've known me a good many years. Maybe this will be the end of your regard for me. But," he says, with a kind of a begging look in his eyes, "I'm going to talk straight. I might say nothing to you, but somehow I'd rather empty both barrels right into your face," he says, "and please don't forget that," he says.

Right then, in spite of his words, I could feel the liking I had for the Old Boss drop down out of my body and kinder leak out at the bottom of my feet. I knew what was coming. I'd waited for somebody to take the first move, and I knew he was going to take it.

"Jim," he says, "you know my boy is attracted by your girl. I guess we've all known it since the Tommy Cutts business," he says. "Well, Jim," he says, "he's getting along, and in the next year or so he'll be out in

the world," he says. "Yesterday he come away from college, and last night he told me he had come up to see your girl and was going to ask her to marry him," he says.

I remember I went to the window and looked out over them piles of snow where the plough had cut through early that morning, and I must say the office seemed kind of hot to me.

"He was pretty straight with you," I says.

"Well, I was with him, too," says the Old Boss. "I told him I wouldn't have it. And I'm straight with you. I'll tell you the same." His jaw was getting to project the way it does.

Maybe I was feeling some of it, too. "Well," I says, "if you've talked to him, there ain't any use of talking to me," I says.

He gave a grunt then. "I don't dare to say too much to my boy," he explained. "The affections is a queer lot of plants," he says; "the more you abuse 'em, the better they grow," he says, "like cussed things — like poison ivy," he says. "It's you and I that have got to settle this."

"Go on," says I.

With that he jumped up and began to walk up and down and kick the corners of the rug, and then he wheeled around on me. "I don't want him to fix anything up with her," he says, growling. "I don't know how deep the thing has got already. I don't know

what has happened. I asked the boy to go back for a week or two and give me a chance to see it his way. And he's gone — went on the noon train. Is he under any kind of obligations to your girl?"

"Yes," I says. "I believe she has given up some of her spare hours to him," I says.

I seen the red come into his face, and then I seen him pull himself together, and he came over and looked at me. He looked as if he liked me. He kinder smiled.

"Jim," he said, "there ain't anything more hard to say than what I've said to you. I don't know your girl. I know she is mighty good to look at. But he's my only boy, and I've always pictured him growing up and marrying a girl who has a little different place than your girl has — a little more of everything. It's hard to know just what it is. Maybe a little more money and a little more education and a little more social life and a little more of a lot of things that you couldn't give your girl. It isn't your fault and it isn't hers. But it's something I feel sure would only make unhappiness, Jim. I don't know why, but it would be bad for both of 'em. They've known different kind of lives. He wouldn't be satisfied with hers nor she with his. He wouldn't understand her friends and she might not like his. I'm trying to play square. I want you to help me to stop it, Jim."

I suppose I would have answered him somehow, if it hadn't been for what happened. I was standing there

and thinking and kinder gagging in my throat, and all of a sudden I seen what I supposed was the right thing.

"Mr. Harvey," I says, "my girl is outside that door there, waiting for me to come out and get my dinner. Why don't you ask me to send her in and let you talk to her — talk alone?"

"Great Scott!" he says. "That wouldn't do."

"What's the matter?" I says. "I thought you was going to be square?"

He shut his fists then, and says, "Send her in."

So I sent her in — she, with her eyes big with surprise and the color just coming back into her cheeks. And I stood like a man at the door of a jury room. Why, I could paint a picture of the grain in that cypress panel right now.

I don't know to this day what was said inside that room. It isn't anything I ever talked about. But when the door opened, I seen the Boss running his fingers through his hair — very fast — again and again. And Katherine came out, and she took my hand, and you'd never known from her face that anything was wrong, but her hand was like the hand of a stone statue on a drinking fountain, only you could feel the nerves in it.

"Mr. Harvey has told me many things," she says, in a clear voice and with her head raised. "And maybe you'd better hear what I'm going to say to him finally, so there won't need to be any misunderstanding,"

she says, easy and clear. "Well, Mr. Harvey, maybe you are right. What you have said amounts to one thing. It is that I have too little to give your son," she says. "Maybe you are right, sir," says she. "How can I say? We are very simple people, and least of all pretentious," she says. "Maybe you know that your son would be unhappy because of me," she says. "It is enough that you think so and have told me," she says. "I will see your son no more. I will tell him that he belongs to a people who are in many ways different from mine — different in several ways. You have said different in money and education and manner of life," she says. "Let me add a few more differences," she says, — "differences in simplicity and good-heartedness and humble faith," she says.

And with that she thought a minute and smiled as natural and good-natured as if she was talking of the fall of snow we'd had. "Oh, no," she says, "I would not marry your son. You have my word, sir."

The Boss looked up at her kind of quick. "You love him, don't you?" he said, as if he didn't want her to say "No."

"Oh!" says she, as if he had struck her square in the face, "I'd rather not discuss that, if you please."

I seen the Boss look up at the ceiling and bite his lips. I remember how the blood was pounding in my forehead till my eyes smarted.

"Suppose it should turn out —" he began.

But she stopped him. "Then," she says, "in that case," she says, with a little laugh, "it would be necessary for his father to come to me when he comes, and ask for me when he asks," she says.

And she turns around to me and says, "Dad, walk home with me, please," and she bowed to the Old Boss, and we went out the factory door and over the railroad bridge and up Maple Hill. She got whiter and whiter, but never said a word till we were in the front room; then she caught the arm of the big chair and sat down.

"Don't ever let my mother know," she says, and then all the mask she'd been wearing dropped off of her, and she dug her face down into the cushions and you could see the shaking of her body.

That was a bad day for us — a bad day for us all. The girl wrote a letter to Bob Harvey. It was the next day. She gave it to me all sealed and stamped without a word and with the touch of her hand like that other in the Boss's office. But though she never let out so much as a whisper, even to me, of course I had to tell my Annie, and little Mike and his brother John was wondering why Katherine didn't play with them any more, romping and hiding and so on at bedtime.

"Never you mind," I says to Annie. "It will soon be forgotten. We make a lot of fuss and noise about to-day, and yesterday is all forgotten to-morrow," I says. "And what I want to know now is why in thunder the person that uses the snow-shovel can't bring

it back and hang it on this nail," I says. "I drove it here on purpose," says I.

But the girl went on silent and thinking, and no one knew what she had in her mind when she'd look up in the evening from her embroidering and let her work fall in her lap and maybe smile at one of us, kinder patient.

CHAPTER XI

It was when there was beginning to be signs of spring coming again that she changed so. It was hard to tell what had come over her. She weren't like herself at all. She began to think of clothes again — not the kind she'd always liked to wear, but shorter sleeves and bigger hats and the like of that. She didn't talk the same. She had a sort of "what's-the-difference" way with her. I seen Annie with tears in her eyes over it more than once. "I don't know what's the matter with the girl," she says to me. "There's something wild about her," she says. "I hate to tell you, Jim," she says, "but she went sleigh-riding yesterday with Myrick, the bank cashier that's been divorced," she says, "and wears them yellow gloves," says she.

Of course you can't tell ever how things would have gone if Anne Villet hadn't come. I sometimes think it is only because people feel responsible to other people that they don't fly off the handle, and it was Anne Villet that made the difference to Katherine. And there wouldn't have been any Anne Villet if it hadn't been for old Joe Paul.

Joe used to work in the factory right there in the basement where the Finns tack heels. It smells damp and cold, and is filled with the kind of sweet smell of

sole-leather from them big, flat, creaking skins piled at the other end of the room. He sat there for fifteen years or more.

A factory like ours can see some strange things, and now and then some strange folks that I don't make out to understand at all. Some of 'em drift in and some of 'em drift out. It's them that stay that you get to know, but Joe Paul stayed on a good many years, and from the beginning to the end there was something I didn't know about him, and I never looked at him without feeling like you do when you try to chew up a mouthful of spinach that's full of grit.

Joe just came from nowhere, as far as anybody could tell, and brought nothing with him. He was old — you couldn't tell how old, and yet it seemed kinder as if somebody'd painted him a few days ago and he'd just stepped out of the frame with his thin, long neck and its loose skin, and his hands with a couple of twists of rheumatism in 'em that made 'em look like hooks, and his old baggy clothes. To be sure, he showed a whole lot of signs of cold water, and his face was pink and scrubbed-looking, even at the bottom of them wrinkles that all ran down one way and give his face a kinder drooped appearance, just like you see in a piece of wet cloth hanging somewhere. And he had a thin, gray mustache, too — and that drooped. And his clothes drooped. But there was a different look in his eyes, though they was always watery, like old people's.

And as I say, so far as he gave out any signs, or so far as anybody knew, he turned up from nowhere.

I can remember him coming to work — bent a little, and a hitch and a spring in his step, and regular at the time-clock for all them years, with never a miss. He used ter walk down from that little three-room house he built up there where the road to the lake runs so close to the bank of the river, just above the Canuck settlement. It may be because he built his shack up near them that the story got around that his mother was a French Canadian, and most everybody believed it. It seemed to me he was too regular and too quiet and didn't use his hands enough. Them Canucks always make motions, even when they talk to themselves, and this old feller kinder let his arms hang at his sides, and when you'd speak to him he would kinder duck as if you'd made a pass at him with a closed fist. The fact is, he was a strange old bird, wearing ear-laps and mittens in winter, and in all the years he was here, and with all the old frayed-out black neckties I've seen on him, — for he'd wear one tie day after day and Sundays till it fell apart and he had to get a new one, — I never yet seen him without a clean collar, low-cut, twice too big for him, and clean.

He never spoke to nobody. The foreman might tell him to do something, and he'd just raise his hands as if he was going to salute like a soldier, and then stop and go off and do what he'd been ordered without a word.

Men got to letting him go by 'em without even saying good morning to him. It was natural. And if it was necessary to ask him a question, he'd just look up kinder surprised and, no matter what it was, he'd say, slow and easy, "Well, now I don't know as I can rightly explain"; and he always said that when he started, even though the answer that came on top of it was just plain yes or no. •

It's funny that we don't know people we see in the factory every day for fifteen years. You'd think in that time you'd have looked at 'em, listened to 'em, and touched 'em enough to know what was inside of 'em. Of course old Joe Paul didn't say much, but a feller would even get to know a dog in that time, and a dog don't say anything at all. You just get to know a dog by whether his nose is hot or cold, whether he chases sparrers after finding out he can't catch 'em, and whether he finds out when the feller who feeds him is feeling sick, and comes up and scratches at the bedroom door with his paw. But it weren't till the end, when Annie Villet come and got a job in the packing-room, that any of us knew what was wrapped up in his package.

Why, before that, I can remember how Bent, that thin, pale feller that was boss downstairs there and married Jennie Lyons — a feller that must have hed powdered alum thrown on his soul, but had a hawk eye and a long white nose that smelled into everything — I can remem-

ber how he sized up Joe Paul. I can hear him now with that whine of his.

“He’s just learned from experience that everybody’s looking out for number one,” he says, “and the big Me,” he says, “and he don’t want nothing to do with nobody. He just draws his dollar and seventy-five a day, and neither that or anything else is anybody’s business but his. He’s wise. He gets good company outer himself. And he don’t talk none because he’s learnt that talk don’t put any good in the stomach.”

“Huh!” says Dave Pierson to him, “if it did you’d be overcrowding your blooming system all the time,” he says.

But Bent went right on, pretending not to hear. And he says: “Why, he don’t even get sociable after the day’s work is over. Don’t I know? I come by his shack a half-dozen evenings a week. He’s always sitting there alone. Looks as if somebody’d thrown him up against that door and jammed him down on to the stone steps. I’ve seen him breaking up a piece of bakery bread to throw to them darn fool birds. He knows them birds has got more sense than men,” he says, “and he’s got a long-stem pipe with a bowl on it as big as a drinking-cup. Haven’t I seen him puff it up red after dark when I was going by? Cooks his own meals,” says Bent. “Ain’t that a sign he hasn’t any use for people?”

“It’s a wonder you wouldn’t cook your meals, too,” says Dave, “seeing you kick so much about ’em. The

trouble with old man Paul is quick said. He's got sour. He's what you call 'turned,' " he says, "and I never see him but what I wish he'd get out of my way. He makes me think of a glass of water with a spoonful of milk in it."

Maybe Joe Paul knew what the fellers and girls thought of him. He never looked at any of 'em when they was looking at him, and kept his eyes down mostly. It was only when he thought nobody was looking that he'd look at people, and then there'd be a kinder warm look in his eyes as if he was fond of 'em. Some of the boys in the village uster throw things at him when he'd go and come after the new library was built, and he spent his evenings reading, but he never turned around. He'd just pull his collar up, maybe, and duck his head into it kinder like a turtle.

And speaking of the library makes me think how Fanny Bowles, whose father raises horses, and she's got a job tending the books, says to me one day: "Mr. Hands," she says, "that old man with the faded brown overcoat," she says, "is the most regular man in town here at the library," she says, "and it's funny, because all he ever cares for is books or pictures about war," she says.

"War?" says I. "That's funny!" I says. "There ain't anything war about old Joe Paul," I says.

"Well," she says, "that's what he wants," she says; "and many the evening he sits here looking at them battle pictures in the 'Universal History of Europe and

America,' " she says, "and running his crooked finger around between his neck and his collar," she says.

And though I thought of it then, I guess it went out of my head, until long after this Anne Villet drifted into town. She came early that spring.

You couldn't tell, even if you seen her, how old she was. Her face was kinder dry, and yet there was something — maybe the look about her neck or ears or the way she walked — would make you think she weren't so old, after all. Her hair was yellow. It didn't look natural yellow, neither, and her teeth would show gold when she opened her mouth, which weren't often, for she usually kept her lips shut close together like a feller in a twenty-round fight that's getting the worst of it. Maybe she was pretty once. And anyhow, she looked pretty sometimes, even then, though she was thin and quick and nervous like a stable cat.

It was kinder funny about her. I happened to be downstairs in the office the day she came to town, and it seemed about her, just as it did about the old man, that she come from nowhere, and yet was just loaded and sore with something — say, like experience. And I heard her talk to the bookkeeper, who took down her name and job and give her a piece-card, and so on. I heard her short, jerky answers like the cracks of a whip. You'd thought she'd been pinched for shoplifting to hear her, she was that defensive about the commonest things. It made you think of somebody who'd started

out to stand against the wallops of the whole world and do it all alone, maybe getting driven back all the time, but fighting all the time, and thinking every bush or tree had somebody hiding behind it with an axe or a life-preserver. That was Anne Villet, and while she lasted she was a good worker. And she had a fierce cough.

She was about as far away from people as Joe. There was something interfering between him and the rest of us, and there was something between her and the rest of us, too — something, whatever it was, that made her say little and brush her yellow hair back with her thin, long-fingered hands, nervous-like. The girls didn't like to be seen talking to her. I can't remember a time when I noticed anybody stop her in the hall. She got a room down at Mrs. Jordan's. It ain't a very nice place, but there weren't any of the other boarding-houses that wanted to take her in.

I heard my Katherine and Betty Morris, who worked in the stitching-room, talking about her, for Katherine took an interest in all that went on at the factory.

"Well, Miss Hands," says Betty, "yer can't expect anything different," she says. "For this Villet girl looks different from any of the rest of us," she says, "and we know nothing about her. We don't even know where she comes from."

I thinks to myself, when I heard her say it, that, after all, there is hard and cruel streaks in women as well as

men, and maybe even more so, except in a few of 'em like my Annie.

"But she must be lonesome," says Katherine. "I know how I'd feel if I come here from the city."

"Ho!" says Betty, "you aren't the same. You aren't young and old looking at the same time," she says, "and your hair is natural, and you don't have them hard eyes. She's tough."

"Tough?" says Katherine.

"Yes," says the Morris girl, lifting that pointed chin of hers. "You know a girl like me can't afford to be having to do with Anne Villet."

I seen Katherine scowl a bit then. Then by and by she said, kinder quick, "Well, there are other girls right in your room that's kind of rough in their manners. Perhaps I am, sometimes."

"Well," says Betty, "maybe so. But they're tough and don't care and laugh and carry on, but Anne Villet don't laugh or carry on, and is kinder suspicious of everybody. There's a lot of difference between them two kinds of toughness."

I don't doubt she was right. Anyhow, this new girl come and went, and what was inside her nobody knew. Once Joe Bent met her coming down over the hill to the factory, and said a word or two to her. And I can see her yet — how she looked up like somebody does to see whether it's going to rain, and then pointed her finger at him sharp and quick and says to him, "Gwan now and

sell your papers." So I knew she was from some big city.

I guess Bent was the last one that tried to say anything pleasant to her except old Joe Paul. The old man come down one afternoon after noon hour, and before he went down to his work he shuffled into the packing-room where she was marking sizes, and he went up to her and looked at the floor.

And he says, "I brought yer a book," he says, laying one down on the bench. "It's called 'Ten American Heroes,' he says, "by a man named Thaddeus B. Wetherby," he says "I thought maybe you had a lot of time alone to yourself," he says.

Well, you could see in a flash how she kinder stiffened up and got on the defensive just as she always did, and her face looked harder and drier than ever. But when she turned around and seen that old fool with his hat off, looking at the floor and his square-toed boots, and smoothing his gray hair, the look kinder slid off her face, slow, and she reached out as if she was going to touch him on the sleeve of that faded brown overcoat of his.

"Say," says she, "I'm much obliged," she says, and maybe she'd have said more if her cough hadn't stopped her, and before she was through coughing old Joe Paul had scuffed his way downstairs.

I suppose anybody would have known if they had taken notice that she was coughing all the time. I guess

she weren't very well. I guess it was mostly her toughness that she was living on.

Anyhow, the old man noticed it. He noticed it just the same as he noticed that she didn't go with anybody and never even spoke to anybody. Father Ryan had been to see her, and he had shook his head at me when he told me, and he says, "Jim, she maybe is a Catholic and maybe not. I can't get it out of her," he says, shaking his head and smoothing his chin on the back of his hand, "and," he says, "I despair of leading her," he says. "There is now and then a woman that has had some kinds of leading so much," he says, "that they won't be led no more by nobody," he says, "though I suppose," he says, "that it is out of the way for me to be admitting failure to soften a heart," he says, "be it as hard as your mother-in-law's pie crust," he says, for he was always forgetting the business of life for his little joke. And maybe even Father Ryan, with his blue eye, that had seen many a good sinful old soul come and go, didn't see what old Paul had seen.

It was one day after work when I went into the wash-room that I caught a bit of it. For I heard voices under the winder, and I knew that the factory had let out half an hour before, and I wondered who it was that was hanging around. So I stuck my head out, and then I seen it was them two just below — Anne Villet with her black hat and old Joe Paul. She was sitting on a empty wooden packing-box, and he was trying to

look at her with his watery eyes. And they was talking together.

Of course I couldn't help hearing 'em, and from what they was talking about you could tell that the girl had just had one of them fits of coughing, and maybe had got a little dizzy and sat down, and old Paul had seen her and had come up.

"You're sick," he says, fooling with the buttons on his coat. "There ain't any use trying to say you ain't," he says. "You've been worrying me for weeks. Well, now let me explain," he says. "I've been noticing. You remember the evening you stopped to rest by my door up there," he says. "I knew you was sick, you was so short-breathed. And I lit a match, pretending it was for my pipe, but it was to see your face, girl," he says. "I'm a good deal older than you," he says. "You take my advice, and don't work for a while, and live mostly on milk," he says.

With that she kinder flattened herself up against the factory wall and steadied herself on it with the flat of her hands. "What do you care?" she says. "I ain't your daughter or nothing. What do you care? It's none of your business what's the matter with me. It's nobody's business but mine, and I don't care." And with that she give a laugh. "I guess I am sick. I don't know. Maybe I'll cash in. What do I care?"

The old man, I could see, kinder stepped back as if she'd hit him in the mouth. He was studying for a

minute, and then he says, as if it was the last thing in the world he'd believe, "Aren't you afraid of death?" he says.

"No," she says. "It's all the same to me whether I keep on or stop; it's all the same to me. I know where I get off!" she says.

Old Joe Paul give a little gasp and kinder shook himself, and I heard him say, "It's funny how different people's instincts are," he says. "I guess I've had a dread of death and injury," he says, "since I was born," he says. "I've always been afraid. I'd give anything in the world not to care."

She was coughing again, but when she stopped she says, "Nonsense!" she says. "What yer want and what you're afraid of is all an idea, that's all."

With that he shook his head. "It ain't so," he says. "My fear ain't never been in my mind," he says. "It's been in my body. It's in the body!" says he. "I couldn't never play ball when I was young," he says, "for I never could see anything coming toward me without dodging," he says.

"Oh, dodge nothing!" she says, with her bold voice.

The old feller looked at her then, and he put his hand out and touched her on the arm. "Girl," he says, "don't be cross with me. I like you. If I'd had a daughter —" he says, and stopped. I suppose he was lonesome. And he touched her arm again.

And with that she give a scream and drew her arm

back quick — snatched it away. I can hear her voice now, rough and angry, like a snapping dog's. "Quit that!" she says. "If you made me cry, do you know what I'd do? I'd kill you!" she says.

The old feller kinder staggered back, ducking his head, and he went shuffling along up the path from the boiler-room, with his head bent over as if somebody was going to hit him over the head with the flat of an axe. And the girl stood up below the winder there, breathing hard and holding herself till he was out of sight, and then she turned face to the wall, and she really begun to cry.

She was sick the next day — sick enough so she couldn't get up, they said. I don't believe anybody paid much attention to it. She was out three days, according to Joe Bent, her foreman, and then she come back the middle of a morning, kinder dizzy and uncertain on her feet, with her jaw set and the hard look in her eyes.

"Mr. Bent," she says, speaking rough, "I ain't ready to be fooled with, and I want to know who it was got so smart when I was down and out and sent me things to eat, and milk, and paid the doctor. I didn't know about it till to-day, and I don't want nobody paying anything for me. I ain't asked no favors of anybody," she says, "and I don't want none. Listen to me!" she says. "If you know who it was, tell 'em from me to stop it if they don't want trouble in car-load lots," she says, "whether it's a man or a woman," she says.

Bent is got a mean streak in him, as I've already said. "Well," he says, "I can tell yer who sent them things," says he. "It was Joe Paul," he says.

She kinder caught her breath then, and looked around to see if anybody'd heard him, and a little smile come into her face, and she caught the edge of the bench she was that weak and sick, and she sat down in a chair and stared out the window, just as if she was thinking and didn't see nothing. And she sat there staring and never moving until one of the girls from the packing-room had been ordered down to help her to walk back to Mrs. Jordan's boarding-house.

She was bad off. It was a week before she was walking around again, and I heard from Mrs. Jordan that old man Paul was paying for the expense, and had made Mrs. Jordan promise not to tell anybody. It was getting dark early them days, for it was before spring had done any more than melt all the snow off and fill the valley with fogs from the thaws and the smell of half-froze mud, and the old man used ter wait till the doctor come in the evening to go up there and see the girl and talk to her and stand her abuse and rough ways. And yet Mrs. Jordan said the girl had changed some. She let the old man help her out. I couldn't hardly believe it. And she even liked to have him come and talk with her between her fits of coughing — not that he said much, but just because it seemed to give her satisfaction to watch him setting by the winder in a rocking-chair, with his old

hook-hands hanging by his sides, until the light had all gone, and maybe she'd dropped off into a doze. Then he'd get up and shuffle out of the room and fill his big pipe going down the stairs.

After a while we heard from Doc Ward that she was getting better. Not cured—but stronger and able to sit up. “Why,” says Ward, “it’s a marvel what a lot of fight in the mind she has,” he says, “and what a lot of strength can be in a poor, thin, worn-out body,” he says.

But at the end of them days it was getting to be warm weather again, and the spring rains had started things growing green and soft once more when she come back to work, though I guess there weren’t half a dozen people in the whole factory paid any attention to it. I understood that Doc Ward and old Joe Paul had done their best to stop her, but she was running herself like some of them who’ve had enough of doing things suggested by others. She was back punching the time-clock, and silent as ever.

She was silent as ever and as much to herself, but there seemed to be a change in her, somehow. Anyhow, Bent told me he thought so. He said she didn’t flare up the way she used ter do. “You’ve seen a horse, Jim,” he says, “that when you rattle the whip in the holder wants to run away or kick out the dasher. That’s the way she was,” he says; “but now,” he says, “she’s like one of them horses that’s got over being ugly, and stands the whip and sticks his head and ears down and

won't change his pace, no matter what happens," he says. "There's something that ain't quite so tough about her," says he.

Maybe it was so, for I believe I seen her smile a couple of times myself. A look of it would come over her when she'd watch old Joe Paul go up the path toward the Canuck settlement after a working day was over.

It's strange how things go out of yer mind. I hadn't thought of either of them two strange specimens for a long time till the second Saturday noon when the feller who used to be foreman of the basement room here seen me going out through the office with a handful of reports for the Old Boss, and hollered out after me.

I stopped, and he says to me, "Say, Jim," he says, "you ain't seen old man Paul, have yer? He ain't been down to-day."

I shook my head; I was thinking of something else, I guess, and it went out of my mind, as I say. Of course if I'd stopped I'd have remembered. I'd have remembered he never lost an hour before since he come into the factory. But I never thought.

CHAPTER XII

THE next day was Sunday, and I can draw a picture of it. I never seen such rain! When I woke up in the morning, it was splashing against my winder, and by noon there was a big cut in the road in front of the house, and we had to put a dish-pan under a place in little Mike's room where the water had come through the ceiling. There was no use of me and Annie and Katherine trying to go to the church, and I wondered how Father Ryan would make up his mind to go himself. The water was just splashing down and going slantwise with the wind.

It had been a dull day, without even a Sunday paper, which is no good anyhow, except that you're always hoping to see something in it the next time you look. It was dark early by the thick clouds and the heavy weather, and all of us was sleepy from doing nothing and eating too much supper.

Maybe that was the reason it jumped me when there come them sharp raps on the front door. It was a wild night with the howl and yell of the wind, and when I turned the knob a chunk of the wet come in to make me step back, and half filled my face with water. Whoever it was pushed their way in, and then I seen it was Anne

Villet. She was out of breath, as though she'd been running, and she had no hat, and her umbrella had been blown inside out. Her face was white, too. I'll never forget it.

"Mercy on us," says Annie, behind me, raising her hands. "How many of yer? What's the matter?" says she. "Have yer seen a ghost?" she says.

"No," says the girl, throwing her umbrella into the corner and walking with them quick steps into the parlor, where she squinted with the light. "No," she says, trying to get her breath, and coughing. "Old Joe Paul is dying."

"What!" says I.

"You heard what I said," she says, sticking her finger at me. "The doctor was there yesterday. I was up at the old man's shack all last night," she says. "He had a stroke. The doctor said he'd cash in the next time he had one," she says, panting. "Do you understand that? It won't be a couple of hours more before it's all over, and the doctor has gone over to Dayton's Mill," she says.

"How did you know this?" says Katherine.

"How did I know?" says she. "You're wasting talk," she says. "I sat up with him since four o'clock yesterday afternoon, that's how!"

"You poor girl! What can we do?" says Annie, for speech was all knocked out of me. "What did yer come here for?"

"I come here," says the girl, leaning up against the table, with her yellow hair hanging in wet strings, "because I thought that man," she says, pointing to me, "was straight and had some sense," she says.

"Jim!" says my Annie to me. "Can't you be alive," she says. "What can we do?"

The girl straightened up and her jaw kinder set and she says, "Listen to me," she says. "Get him a band — a brass band — a band with drums."

At that I guess the two of us looked at her as if she had been as crazy as a straw in a whirlwind.

"A band!" says Katherine, with her eyes as big as butter-plates.

"What's the matter with yer?" says the Villet girl, talking faster and rougher. "Yes, a band!" she says. "You don't know about him. Well, there ain't much time to tell it. Now listen! I know about this just the same as he knows about me, see?" she says, "and he knows it all."

"There was a war," she says, going on, "a war. It was the Civil War. And this old man was young then," she says. "He was not much more than a boy. Oh, I ain't got time to tell it all."

"A band?" says my Annie, as if she didn't understand. That was enough to start the girl on her story again. "My God, yes!" she says. "There was bands playing and men marching, and he was full of it. He went with 'em. He had to go with 'em. He joined the

army. He's told me about it in pieces. They went to Washington on the train, and marched through the mud days and days, with their guns and bands and all. I can see 'em just as if I'd been there. He didn't mind the being tired or hungry or none of them things. He had grit. I understand him all right, and he knows it."

"The Civil War?" says I.

"Yes," she says, "that was it—the Civil War. And he got a letter from home, and the next day they come to a place called the something Forks, with pine trees, and over the hill there was guns going off and smoke. An ambulance wagon come by, and there was fellers in it that had been torn up with fighting. It made him sick. It weren't his fault. There was courage in his mind. But his legs wouldn't stand for it. His body and his stomach wouldn't stand for it."

She had a fit of coughing then, and she stuffed her hand over her mouth.

"And then," she says, "he sneaked into them pine woods, and he seen a flag waving over the ridge a second, and he sat behind a tree and cried because he couldn't fight — because his body wouldn't let him fight. And he went back through the woods. He deserted. He ran away. He went back near his home once, and at night he looked at the house where his folks was. They'd found out he'd deserted. So he couldn't go in and see any of 'em. I know how he felt. I've been in

the same fix. He couldn't disgrace 'em. And he never seen 'em again. It had bust his spirit," she says.

"He looks at the ground now," I says.

"Yes," says she, "and you've seen dogs that will flinch and duck like him. He ain't to blame. It happened in three minutes. He's been trying to repair it for forty-five years. There's some things that ain't never got rid of by men and women," she says.

"That's true, I believe," says Katherine, very soft.

"Sit down," she says. "You're weak with climbing the hill."

"No," says the girl, shaking her head and shutting her thin hands. "Nothing seems to make up for some things," she says, going on. "It don't seem to make any difference how honest or straight or kind he is, the ducking and flinching follers him just the same. And now," she says, "it's the last chance to wipe it all away," says she, "*and I've got to have a band!*"

"A band!" I says again.

"Yes!" she says. "Listen to me. I'd do anything for a brass band — maybe two or three instruments and a drum. Why, look at me. It's a yoke. I've prayed for a band, Me!" she says. "Don't you see? He's a bit light in the head. And he thinks the company of soldiers is coming for him. He thinks there is another war. He thinks they've got the same flags. He thinks they've got the same men. My God, he must have that satisfaction! He must hear a band outside!

Don't yer understand? He thinks they're going to take him back — let him join again! And he thinks that this time he won't duck or flinch but just fight — fight — fight."

"Mercy on us," says Annie, "won't anything else do?"

"No," the girl says, "that's the one thing. Just a moment is enough. Don't I know? Don't I get to wishing for one thing I can't have. I don't want pity. It makes me tired. I can't stand it. I don't want people to be sorry for what I ain't. I'd like to feel just once for a moment that I was everything to somebody—I don't care who—because of what I am," she says. "Now do you see? Just for one moment. And so he must hear a band coming," she says, breathing hard.

"Yes," says I, speaking, half afraid of her. "We got to have a band," and I started to think.

Then I seen Katherine was plucking at her dress. "Father," says she, "there is Fred who works at the barber shop. He plays with the Light Guards. He has a cornet," she says, "and old Cady with the drum," she says; "they don't live far. It's a bad night," she says, "and they'll be in. And Moses Dayton plays the horn, don't he?" she says. "Dad!" she says, opening the closet door and pulling down a rain coat. "It's got to be done! You go back with the girl to the old man's shack. 'Twould be a crime if anything happened to

him while he was alone. 'Take the girl and hurry,' she says. "I'll do my best," she says.

With that she opened the door and was lost in the black as if she'd gone behind a curtain.

"Come — you!" says the Villet girl. And so I just grabbed my coat and follered her.

I'll not forget the slap of the sleet. There was times when I could scarce see the girl, who run along beside me. We went stumbling down the hill to the old covered bridge, where the wind hollered, and up the hill on the other side. And up there, where the road runs close to the edge of the river-bank, I seen the light from the winder in his little shack. It seemed to kinder flicker there was that much storm. And I thought of the old pipe with the big bowl he uster smoke after supper.

We pushed in the door, she in front, and I seen over her shoulder that he was lying on the bed, and I thought maybe we was too late. But the rush of air made him move a little, and he opened his eyes once and closed 'em. And I heard her give a little cry as if she was satisfied.

There weren't much light — just a old kerosene lamp with a dirty chimney. It was enough for me to look around. I'd never been in there before. His clothes was hanging to nails on the wall, and in one corner there was a cheap bunting flag hanging down from the ceiling. There was a leak in the back room, and you could hear the drops slap on a tin dish, even and slow and ugly.

"Is there anything to do?" I whispers.

"No," she says, "there ain't."

So I sat down.

By and by she pointed at him with her finger, kinder biting her lip, and she says: "It's funny, ain't it, how things happen. He's the only thing I cared anything for," she says.

And from that on she never said nothing. Once he moved, and she poured some water out of a pitcher into a white cup, but he only looked up at her and nodded and shut his eyes again. I could almost feel my ears stretching open for the sound of something besides the dropping of that water in the back room, or maybe it was for the sound of a drum.

Then all of a sudden the old man started up. I guess he forgot he was in bed.

"Listen!" he says. "Are they coming? Anne," he says, "I've got good news for you. The company is going to take me back. The old town will know there ain't anything the matter with me then," he says. "They'll know I was only a boy. They'll know when men is wanted I'll be ready. It's funny why they don't come," he says, with trouble in his face. "A whole regiment marched through this morning. They was covered with dust. They'd been going since daybreak to get to the main line," he says.

And then for a while he was quiet, as if he was listening. "They called us deserters, Anne," he says, beginning

again. "You and me — each in our way. Well, that's all gone by," he says. "Listen," he says; "did you hear music?" he says. "I don't see why they're late. This time I won't fail 'em. I expect they'll be here soon. And then I can start," he says, pointing with one of his bent hands. I remember how noisy the wind was.

Then all of a sudden I seen his eyes open wide and a bit of blood come into his face, and them droopy lines tightened up. "Listen!" he says. "They're coming!"

At that the Villet girl stood up. And in spite of the noise of the rain on the roof and the wind we could hear a drum, and then sometimes it seemed as if there was a cornet with it. And then it stopped. It was just as if ghosts had been playing.

The old man, though, was all alive. "They've halted," he says, "they've halted in front of the Court-house," he says. "They're coming. I'm glad I got a pair of shoes that was easy. It makes a heap of difference," he says, and blinks his watery old eyes.

And then suddenly I heard them boys with a horn and a drum and a cornet — there was three of 'em! It weren't a hundred yards away and coming nearer through the rain. And the old man commenced to beat time with his hands.

"They're here!" he says. "Now I can start. They're going to take me with 'em. The same old company — eighty-four men and officers. Well," he says, "it's time to say good-by."

He looked at me with his head cocked on one side and his gray hair all mussed up, but didn't seem to see me at all, nor my girl Katherine, who had stepped inside the door. He looked around until he seen Anne Villet.

"Come here, girl," he says.

The music was nearer. It was a march and didn't sound very good, but it was a march, and loud and gingery. And then Anne went over to him, and he pulled her down toward him and looked into her face.

"I've got to say good-by to you, girl," he says. "It's kinder hard, but then when it's all over and we come marching back with flags waving and everybody cheering, you'll be glad then," he says. "Don't you mind, Anne," he says, "whatever they say to you. You know how I feel. You've got courage, Anne," he says. "You've got courage and grit enough for two," he says. "Why, I love you just as if you was my daughter. And I'm so proud of you," he says, and he tried to bend over toward her.

The music had come up to the shack, and only the drum was playing then.

"Well," says he, "they've come," and he give a sigh as if he was contented. "Come, Anne. Hand me my hat," he says, pointing with his finger at a cushion in the chair.

I guess she never heard him. She'd kinder buried her face in the bedclothes. So he reached out and caught the cushion in his old fingers, and he tried to

put it on his head. It was stuffed with them pine needles. And it kept falling off in spite of all he could do. I almost laughed.

But when I looked again, I got up and went to the door and says out into the wind and the rain, "That's enough," and the drum stopped. And then I looked back into the room and seen Anne Villet. Come from nowhere! But right then I seen by the light of that dirty kerosene light that she had got what she wanted as well as him. She stood beside the bed there staring out at nothing, with a smile. You'd never have known her.

CHAPTER XIII

It was Katherine who first spoke in that room. She had come in, and she went up to the other girl and she took her in her arms as if it was a comfort to her to have something to care for. "Girl," she says, "don't pull yourself away from me like that. You're all tired out — all tired out," she says. "So am I," she says. "You're going home with me for a while."

And Anne Villet looked around at her, and for the first time I seen the moment she weren't suspicious. She looked into Katherine's face as if she was hunting for something there, and then after a minute she says, "You are tired out, aren't you?" she says. "I guess I understand," she says.

"Katherine!" I says, kind of quick. But my girl stopped me.

"She's going home with us for a few days," says she over again. "I won't let her go back to that Mrs. Jordan's. And my mother will be glad to have her come," and I seen her chin move out the way my Annie's does when I know I ain't going to have my way.

That was how Anne Villet came into the house, and Katherine, though she never said anything about it, was trying to make the poor thing all over again.

Maybe them things don't seem to some people like they do to me.

The spring had come then. And in those days, with the sun and the wind kinder soft, and tips of green showing here and there, and maybe birds you haven't seen all winter turning up and sitting on the ridge-pole of the barn, and them insects piping in the marsh, it's a feller's inclination to kinder half shut his eyes and watch what's going on and think about it — like them toads that come out and sit on the gravel walk do.

I used to watch Annie — how she didn't like to have the strange girl in the home, and yet wouldn't see her go away while she was still weak and sick. And I used to watch Katherine — how she'd never let Anne Villet into her life, but how she tried to squeeze herself into the life of the other girl and kind of soften her and make her different. And I used to watch Anne Villet when she would follow my girl around with her eyes. But most of all I seen that it weren't so much that Katherine was getting ahead any as it was that she was, without knowing it, changing herself. She was more like herself in them days — more the old look in her eyes.

Of course I wondered sometimes about Bob Harvey. I'd got to like him, and I wondered if he still wanted Katherine and thought of her. Once that June a letter came from him to her; there was only one word on the sheet, and the next day I heard Katherine sing again the way she used to. I told her that night that I

noticed it. She only shook her head and showed me the letter. The word was "Katherine." No name signed or anything. Just something like a voice calling, and that was all. But she shook her head and sang no more.

Then we heard he had come home. His college was through for that year. I thought I seen him walk by the house one evening, and then I heard he'd gone away again, and it was said he'd gone because his oldest sister had come up with her husband — the little New York broker that Bob didn't like.

The Boss's oldest daughter isn't liked very well herself in this town. But after all, people is mostly alike. We're always saying how they're different. But they ain't. Maybe their clothes is different. It's the crease in the pants or the bird on the hat that makes it. Underneath they is all cut out of the same piece of leather, just like the tips on a case of shoes that we turn out down there at the shop. Maybe some tips is plain, maybe some is scalloped, and maybe some is punched with fancy holes — it's the same leather. Ben Joline was big-hearted, but he was a good deal like Dave Pierson, who's got a soul about the size of an earth-worm's tooth. And my wife Annie, who I wouldn't swap for a pick of all the women on the map, is, after all, considerable like round-faced Bessie Eastman, who works on the books at the office, and would be swapped by her husband — poor devil — for a box of safety

matches. At the bottom they're the same animals. And then the Boss's oldest daughter was like Carrie Pierson — Dave's wife! There was a contrast for yer. You'd say those two was about as alike as a fire-escape is like a rowboat, putting aside the fact that both of 'em is pretty women.

I never knew much about the Boss's oldest daughter, except what I seen of her. Her name's Marian — Mrs. Elmore. I guess her husband don't satisfy the Boss very much, for the Boss wears baggy trousers week-days and makes a lot of money, and this other feller carries a handkerchief with a colored border and has money and spends a lot.

Mrs. Elmore and her husband, with his high chin and a cold in the head and rings under his eyes, didn't make a hit with us at the factory. They never bowed to none of us, and they was a lot more exclusive than the Boss's younger girl and the Boss. The Boss wouldn't think of acting fancy any more'n I'd think of wearing corsets! But Marian, when she came back after all them years she'd been married, got the name of it. It used to bother her to see the old man walk up the hill from the factory and pick up a kid that was playing in front of one of those shacks down here, and maybe get molasses on his collar from the kid's fingers.

I heard her once. "It ain't dignified," says she.

The old man laughed and says, "Why, what's dignity?" And I, who was walking along behind 'em,

am old enough to know that when people get to talking about dignity, they're more sure to go wrong than them who never think of it.

And this girl, — well, she really weren't a girl, for there was some gray in her black hair that was always done up so neat and city-looking, and I guess a wrinkle or two had come by the time she was thirty, in spite of this massage I see advertised in the Sunday papers, — well, this girl had the wrong manners all right. Somehow her dresses fitted her too tight, though she had a good figure; and she'd get out of her husband's big automobile down there in the town and go into a store and give directions just as if she'd hired the store-keeper — say, a feller like John Bethime — to be on hand there to wait on her, which weren't so.

I used to be amused by her, and that was before that evening when the worst thing happened that could make Katherine more miserable than ever, and as it turned out turn everything around again.

I've just mentioned Carrie Pierson. She had it in for Mrs. Elmore, and it was surprising how well she could imitate her.

Carrie was a blonde, and had been married two years or so. She was just a factory girl, and the Boss's oldest daughter was a society woman, they said. Carrie ain't got much education, but Mrs. Elmore speaks French to the hired girl that travels around with her to crinkle her hair every morning. Mrs. Elmore

didn't know any more about Carrie than I know about my great-grandfather, but to hear Carrie talk, you'd think she knew all about Mrs. Elmore.

The girl had a sharp tongue. She was the best-looking girl in the factory once, and she could keep the boys guessing what she'd say next, and she was full of the devil, though there was nothing bad in her, and you could hear her singing when she'd be coming down to the shop of an early morning. A happy girl with fine blue eyes — and no one knew what she married Dave for.

But she did, and you'd not have known her for the same. She was still pretty, but the change was in her mind. Her mother — the widder who used to be a forewoman down in Coleman's factory — died about that time, but it weren't that. It was just because all days were alike to Carrie after she'd been married. Up at six to get breakfast and wash up the dishes and follow along with Dave down to the factory, with him saying nothing to her, being a man who don't think there's any use to talk to a woman when you're married to her; and then the day at the factory, and go home at night to get supper, and sit and read a ten-cent book in the evening, with Dave playing pool down ter Charlie's place, and go to bed and get up in the morning to get breakfast and wash the dishes and follow Dave. What's the use? It went round and round, like a belt on a shafting, which tickles some women ter death — and kills others.

Dave's wife weren't no fool. She got sour, and knocked all them that had what she hadn't. She got to wishing she had money. She'd come over sometimes to see my Annie and tell what she'd hoped ter have once — what she'd planned. And then she'd laugh without any fun in it, and tell how she'd got to sew a yard of velvet around her summer hat now it was coming on cold weather. But she weren't no fool. She was just tired and sour with days that was all alike. There was something else the matter with her, — the real thing, — as you'll see later when I tell yer. Women is funny, anyhow, as you know, being a man.

Then Mrs. Elmore came to town, with her tight dresses and her hair so slick that it looked as if it had been whittled out of graphite, and her automobile, and her fuzzy dog with its homely face, and her husband with his.

Great guns, as the Boss says, didn't it make Carrie mad! She picked up all her sourness and collected it into a bunch and added a little more to it and plastered the Boss's daughter with it whenever she got a chance — sometimes before the other factory girls, as she was working pasting upper leather in the stitching-rooms; and sometimes she'd come over to see my wife Annie in the evening to get rid of it. I don't know as Annie ever put the brakes on it. Part of what she said you could say weren't so, and the other part looked as if it might be so on a pinch. Carrie weren't no fool, and

we listened. I can hear Katherine now, the way she'd laugh at Carrie's imitations.

She'd come up that little gravel walk there the other side of where you're standing, swishing her calico skirts around, with her nose up in the air, and holding her hands kind of fancy. It was good on Mrs. Elmore, all right.

"Women gets the worst of it in this world," says Carrie — I remember just how she'd talk. "Here I've been getting good money by piece-work for seven years. And *she* ain't never done no work. Men gets what is coming to 'em, mostly, but women is born to it or married to it. Women is all luck — there ain't any way out."

"And," she says, "her stuck-up ways make me so tired I can hardly walk ter the factory and back. What's she ever done to stick her powdered chin into the air? Who's she that she can come down with the Boss to see the factory and talk with the girls, and then forget to see 'em in the post-office? She ain't an actress or a book writer or nothing like that. She never earned nothing. She's about as deserving as that dog of yours, Mr. Hands," she says, "who gets fed twice a day free, and then bites the heads off my two best chickens," she says. "Working in a factory's awful. There ain't any variety. What's she know about that? Just a cold-natured woman inside of fancy clothes, driving around cities in carriages and going to theatres — the

silly thing! Where'd she get her rights? Who says there's any fairness in the world for girls and women?"

"Not me," I says. "God Almighty may be kind, but it seems like He does a poor job taking care of women," I says.

"Wouldn't it drive you crazy," she says, "to be wishing you was her, and then the next minute be seeing what a stuck-up thing she is? *She's* comfortable, and that's all she cares. What difference do the girls in the factory make to her?" she says. "Does she know that Jennie Hemphill has got consumption so her neck's so thin you can put your finger around it — and that the Boss is going to pay her way to an asylum or something? Not on your life! No, she's off trying to buy mahogany furniture from the farmers' wives for less than it's worth. Didn't May Coffin tell me? Does she know that May had to leave her mother because she drank? I guess not! What does she care about people, anyhow? She has what *she* wants — and she never earned it, either. And who did May Coffin go to see when she got in trouble by running off with the clerk of the hotel? The Boss's youngest daughter. How about her going to see the oldest daughter — this Marian Elmore? That's funny now, ain't it? That would make you laugh, wouldn't it?"

That's the way she'd talk, and I'd be sitting smoking my pipe on the steps — for it was summer then, and the kids would be off to bed.

Annie'd say, "Probably she is better than you think."

'Twas said for the sake of kindness, which is like her, and gets more so as she grows older, and you could tell it weren't said for truth.

"She smokes cigarettes," says Carrie Pierson, acting kind of tired and leaning up against that tree there, and dropping her hands. "But," she says, "if *I* smoked cigarettes, she'd be the first to call me a bad woman — a factory hand."

"The rest of the Boss's family is all right," says Annie.

"Maybe — I guess they is," Carrie says. "But O dear, there's few of them! Sometimes I think 'tis only them that's good who is fools and unhappy."

"So does everybody — sometimes," says I.

Then off she'd go home to read more paper books under a kerosene lamp in the kitchen and wait for Dave ter come back from down on Main Street and say nothing to her and go ter bed. And I never liked Dave so well as I like my gate-post, anyhow.

CHAPTER XIV

I HAVE cause to remember the night Carrie broke loose. It had been one of them still spring days, and there was no staying in the house in the evening, it was that close, and I could hear little Mike threshing back and forth on his bed upstairs long after his mother had leaned over him with a blessing for him and had gone to bathe her face and hands in a dipper of well-water.

All of a sudden I hears somebody coming down over the hill. Our hedge by the fence is all thick with leaves, and though there was plenty of noise from the crickets in the grass, I could hear whoever it was breathing fast behind it, and it sounded like trouble of some kind to me.

It was Carrie, and when she finally made up her mind to come in, and got to where the light from the moon shined on her face, I knew I was right. She'd been crying, and she was biting her lips, and she had a little bag with her, and she was shaking like a horse that feels the jockey trying the saddle.

I knew it weren't me she wanted to see, and by the looks of things I didn't want to mix in very thick with the fuss, whatever it was. So I calls to Annie, and she

comes out the screen door, and held it open with one hand, letting in the mosquitoes, and looked kind of scared the minute she set eyes on Carrie.

"God save us! What's the matter? What's happened?" says she.

Carrie pulls in her breath and says, choking, "I'm going away, Annie dear. You mustn't tell anybody. Nobody knows it but you. I couldn't bear not to say good-by."

"When will you be back?" says Annie.

"I won't come back," says the girl. "I can't stand it any more. It's all the same. And oh, I could stand it if he was different! But it's just the same thing over and over again. I ain't married like I thought it would be. He don't never show me no affection. He don't love me. I'm just a hired girl. And you mustn't tell Dave, Mr. Hands," says she to me, "for I hardly know what I'm saying, and I'm going away."

"You're going right back home," says Annie. But Carrie shook her head. "I'm going on the nine-fifteen down train," says she. "There ain't anything can make me stay." And she set down on the bench and pushed her face down on to the back of it, and, though I'd heard somebody whistling, it weren't till then, when all was still, that I looks up and sees Mrs. Elmore — the Boss's oldest daughter, standing there in the gateway.

"Has my dog been here, people?" she says, and her

voice was soft and pretty, and kind of sad. "For he's run away, and Mr. Elmore went up into the fields looking for him, and I've come down this way into the village to look. He's been gone since dinner."

It took us by surprise, and I guess Carrie Pierson didn't hear her at all, for, just after I'd said I hadn't seen nothing of the dog, she caught her breath and began to gulp the way a woman does when something real is the matter. Mrs. Elmore — the broker's wife — she seen it.

And you can knock me down if she didn't come in, and before we knew it she touched the girl on the shoulder. "What's the matter?" she says, turning to my wife. "Is this young woman in trouble?" she says.

Annie didn't answer, but the girl herself looked up, kinder surprised, like somebody that's been waked up to get off at the next station. And when she seen who it was, her jaw kinder set.

"What's that to you?" she says. "Do I cut any figure with you?" she says. "You talked to me one day and forgot to see me on Main Street the next. How do my troubles hurt you?" And she stood up and looked the other woman straight in the eye. "Is there any difference between you and me except you've got money and I ain't?"

"Don't talk foolish," says my Annie.

But it was just the wrong word. It seemed to be like throwing kerosene on hot coals. You know how it

comes up like a white vapor and then goes off with a bang.

Well, Carrie threw her hands back, and she says, beginning kind of whispering and slow, "You are that kind of woman that don't know what people are," she says. "How are you to know, with the life you lead? Well, I'll tell yer!" She reached out and grabbed one of the other woman's hands. "Do you feel that hand of mine? It's rough, and yours is soft," she says. "It's rough because I wash dishes twice a day and peel potatoes and work over the glue-pots," she says, "and yours is smooth because you don't. And you and I," she says, "are near of an age, and you've got wrinkles worrying because you don't know what pleasure to have next, and I got mine wondering where I'd ever get any. You don't know," she says, still talking kind of slow, "what it is to have every day like the next and the other one before it, up here in this muddy factory town. And so you don't understand. You're too much society," she says, "to have it make any difference to you that I can't stand it any more, that I've got to go away or die," says she, "and I'm going on the down train to-night, and it was seeing you in your automobile," she busts out loud, "with the life you lead, that waked me up to it. You who don't care — I'm much obliged to yer!"

And she stood there with her jaw set, reaching behind her for her little bag on the bench, and breathing

like she'd been running four miles. And the other woman — this Mrs. Elmore — she was breathing, too.

After a second, though, she looked up and took a step forward and caught at Carrie's sleeve and says, whispering, "For God's sake, forgive me, woman," says she. "I'm not different from any other, as you think," she says, soft. "I'd not make you unhappy for all the world!" And right there, in spite of the powder and slick hair and tight-fitting dress and the smell of perfume in the air, as she stood in the moonlight, any fool could see we'd made a mistake about her when you'd really got to the bottom of her. And Carrie looks up into her eyes a second, and then she sat down on the bench, sitting up very straight and still, looking like she'd seen something queer, and reaching out for the other woman's hand.

"And you'll not go away?" says Mrs. Elmore, begging.

"Yes," says Carrie. "I'm going," and she puts her face in her hands, and the Boss's daughter sits down beside her and says, easy but anxious, "Tell me why."

"I've told yer," says Carrie. "These people know. It's awful. I used to dream about what it would be. But it's awful. And he never takes my hand in his, and he never tells me anything, and he don't say he loves me till I ask him. I'm nothing to him, and I'm going away. I could stand it if — " And there she stops. I can remember it well.

And the Boss's daughter says, after a minute, "Do

you think that you are the only woman that's hungry for love?" she says.

But Carrie jumped up as if she'd not heard. "I'm going away," she says. "None of you can stop me. It's too late," she says, with a voice as hard as a frog's croak. "I've left a note for him, and my wedding-ring. They're under the lamp in the kitchen." And with that she started away from us.

"Wait," says the Elmore woman, and her voice was so clear and true that Carrie stopped.

"Have you thought of the other women yet?" asks the Boss's daughter, facing her.

"What other women?" says Carrie.

"Oh," says Mrs. Elmore, kinder careless, "the other married women that want to be loved — those that is brave enough to bear it all — the neglect and all of it. And have you thought of them others that is tempted to run away — them poor, desperate women — perhaps factory people and perhaps women who ride in motor-cars — that are tempted]—always tempted — to give it up? What will they say when you have gone?"

"What are they to me?" says Carrie, staring hard in the moonlight.

"Good God!" says the Boss's daughter, "they should be much to both of us, shouldn't they?"

And at that Carrie's bag slid out of her fingers on to that gravel walk there, and she kept on staring without trying to pick it up.

"I'm only — what did you say? — a pleasure-lover, a society woman," says the Boss's daughter, with a ketch in her throat, which was bare and white against the lilac bush, "and I think of those women very often."

It was then that Carrie caught hold of the tree, and you could see her shoulders moving, and you knew she'd not go away. You knew that Mrs. Elmore, who come into it by chance, had won. And there weren't a sound but the noise of the crickets and the little tinkle of the beads that hung down from her neck when she'd breathe.

And then, after a minute, Carrie came back and sat down, and looked up at the other woman and smiled. And Annie smiled, too, and I knocked the ashes out of my pipe to make a noise of some kind. And my feet seemed to ache from standing.

"I guess I'd better be going home," says Carrie by and by.

"Of course you had," Annie says.

Mrs. Elmore started up as if she'd been in a dream. "Not alone?" she says. "Wouldn't it be best if we all walked with her by those cottages?" she says. "If people see her alone with the hat and bag —" she says.

"They'd talk till Christmas," says my Annie, "in this town," she says.

And somehow the women-folks fixed it so's they go off across that field that's so white this morning that you can't hardly look at it, to that last house on Maple Street, — that red one-story cottage you can just see, —

and I was to go up by the road to stop Dave if he was on his way home, and keep him talking awhile and meet 'em up at his house.

And when I went out the gate, there was a man standing in the shadow behind the hedge!

It was just luck I seen him. He didn't move none, and I guess he thought I hadn't spotted him. A quick suspicion comes to me, and I reaches quick around to my hip pocket and says, "Helloa," kinder soft.

"Quiet!" he says, coming up to me. And it was Carter Elmore!

He was kinder white and excited. "I was looking for my wife," he says. "We was out trying to find her dog," he says, chopping his words. "I heard voices — I stopped — I heard it all," he says, "and was trying to get away when you come out. You're one of the men at the factory? Don't, for God's sake, let her know I was standing here," he says. "I heard her say, 'the other married women that wants to be loved.' Don't tell her I heard it. Do you see? I don't want her to know," he says. And then he puts his thin hand on my shoulder and brings his white face up near me like this, and says, like a panhandler asking for a handout, "Don't let her know I heard it, will you?"

"No," says I, and we left each other, and I went on up to Maple Street.

But I didn't run into Dave. I heard the train go out of the station as I got to the corner of the road. It

makes a fierce noise on a still night getting up the grade to the bridge.

Then I went along Maple Street, and the women was just coming out on to the walk through a break in the stone wall. I shook my head to show I hadn't seen Dave, and we went on to the house.

The door into the kitchen was open, and the kerosene lamp was burning on the table, and from outside you could see the wedding-ring shining bright and prominent on the bare wood. And there on his knees beside the table was that son of a gun with the sheet of white paper crunched up in his hand; and, by thunder, he was crying like a baby! He was crying, with his derby hat pressed up against his face.

But it pleased the girl. She seen that Dave loved her, after all. And I guess he did. And when we'd said good night to the Boss's daughter a little later, and she'd started up over Maple Hill, something made me look back at her. And right up there in the middle of the road on the ridge, so any one could have seen it in the moonlight for twenty miles around, stood Elmore, — the little broker, — waiting for her.

So when Annie and I walked home, she put her hand on my arm the way she hadn't done for a long time. "Jim," she says, "we've been pretty happy — you and I," she says. "I think I got a good husband," she says, with a little laugh, "though not above the average in appearance — speaking with great charity," she says.

And somehow I was happy and satisfied myself when I got in between the clean sheets that night, even though I could hear Katherine in the next room tossing around and very restless.

It was the next morning at breakfast, when the sun was coming in the window and the ceiling was all spotted with lights from the coffee dancing in my cup, that Anne Villet came in, and we seen some change had come to her.

She looked as if she hadn't slept, and there was a wild look in her eyes, and her clothes was put on the way she used to put 'em on before she came to live with us and Katherine had been a friend to her. There was a dog look in her face, and the skin around her eyes was all dark and pulled, as if she had been up and walking the whole night.

She had her jaw shut hard, and never said a word until she had swallowed her oatmeal in gulps and she seen Katherine was looking at her.

"I'm going away," she says, all of a sudden, and dropped her spoon on the floor. "You've been pretty good to me," she says, looking at us, "but I have work to do," she says, with an ugly voice. "I'll get what's due me, or I'll kill somebody," she says. "I won't wait. It will be to-day;" and her voice was hard and cracked and like it was when she first came to the factory. It scared little Michael. His eyes was as round as the bottoms of two butter dishes.

“Anne!” says Katherine, with her voice shaking, and the girl looked up at her. “Why, Anne!” she says again, “what is the matter?”

But there was no control to be had of her. “Why shouldn’t I tell?” she says in answer. “Let this be enough for you all. Ask me no more questions. Some women have a memory of some man they can’t forget,” she says with a growling in the back of her throat. “Them who has lost everything by him is ready to render him a statement, as the grocer says. Well, listen,” says she. “Last night,” she says, “after all this time — months and years, I seen him! I looked out my window and I seen him, standing in the road beyond the gate!” she says.

“Who?” says I.

The rat look was in her eyes and she stood up.

“In front of the gate?” says Katherine, and she was as white as a starched collar.

But Anne Villet only stiffened her body. “I’ve said too much to you,” she says. “It was him who squeezed the best out of me, as you’d wring a cloth,” she says. “And it’s him I’ll have it over with and not you,” she says, with a snap of her teeth like a wild animal, and she ran upstairs and I heard her door slam.

“Annie,” I says to my wife, “I’ve got to go. But this ain’t a laughing matter,” I says. “There’s a volcano under this roof,” I says. “You must find out who the feller is,” says I, and I remember how, when I

left the room, I seen Katherine still sitting over her plate that she hadn't touched, with her red lips half open and staring out at nothing.

But her mother didn't find out anything. She met me when I came home that night outside the house. "Jim," she says, "there was no talking to Anne Villet," she says. "She was in her room all day and the door locked. Just now, when I was in the kitchen and it was getting dark, she went out," she says.

"Where is Katherine?" I says, and I seen the worried look in her face.

"I can't understand," she says. "Katherine has tried a dozen times to get Anne to unlock her door," she says. "Katherine acts so funny!" says she, plucking at her apron. "She's gone to the barn just now."

I never answered her, but I walked around the house. I could feel the evil in the air, and there weren't anything cheerful in the rustling of that corn that was turning yellow beyond the chicken houses.

It was true. Katherine was there. She was sitting on the feed box inside the door and bent over with her head in her hands.

"Girl!" I says.

"Oh," she says, "I've been waiting for you," she says, with the words coming hard.

"What's the matter now?" I says, harsh and stern.

She kinder shivered from the cold, and came over and buried her face in my coat, and I could feel her hair

against my cheek and her lungs filling when she tried to catch a breath.

“Tell me !” I says.

“Last night,” she says, never moving her head, “last night I saw him for the first time in all these months. He must have come back to town. He came and stood in front of the house. I was in the parlor. I was in the shadow behind the curtain. I watched him. He had been going by, probably, and stopped. It was Bob Harvey. And Anne Villet —” she says, and stopped and dropped her head. “It was him she meant !”

CHAPTER XV

I MUST have stepped back, for I remember when I realized I was a couple of paces away from her. "Then, thank God," I says. "The miserable cuss! We've been saved from him!" I says, and went to her and put my arms around the girl, and she never seemed so much to me before.

"But it isn't true," she says, starting away from me again. "I know!" she says. "He would never harm anybody — he would never harm a woman," she says, "and if he did, he was young, and it was long ago," she says. "But it isn't true!"

I caught her arm then and went with her to the back door.

"Don't tell anybody," she says. "It isn't true. Why, God wouldn't let it be true!"

"Wait," I says, and my hand was shaking around the cold door-knob. "Wait till we know. Wait till Anne Villet comes back. Trust me," I says.

But Anne Villet didn't come back. That midnight came, and there was no sign of her. I remember of waking a dozen times and turning over in bed and listening to the trees rocking with a big wind and waiting to hear the sound of a key in the front door.

That next day was one of the brightest I ever seen, with the sun lighting up the hills, and the air as clear as new eye-glasses. When I got on my clothes, the first thing I did was to walk to the stranger girl's room. It come to me all of a sudden that though day after day had gone by with her in the house sick and coughing, she was a stranger. There wasn't one of us — not even Katherine — who knew anything about her, after all.

Her room was empty; she hadn't slept there. Some of her clothes was scattered over the bed, and on the floor was an old blue necktie that used to belong to old Joe Paul, and near the door on a corner of the matting there was a little photograph lying face up and looking as if somebody had dropped it in a hurry on the way out. I leaned over and looked at it. It was old, and taken by some photograph parlor in Chicago. It weren't Robert Harvey, and yet it looked a lot like somebody I'd seen before. I remember how I shut my eyes and tried to place the face in the picture, and how I gave it up and noticed the empty chair drawn up to the window where she'd sat and watched the feller who had come and stood before our gate. "Little the scoundrel thought he was within thirty feet of his past," I says to myself.

Then I looked in the closet. Her little satchel was gone, and I was sure then we wouldn't ever see Anne Villet again. I told my Annie and Katherine when I'd come in from feeding the horse. None of us said much. There wasn't much to say. But I seen that Katherine

had learned a lot that night. I seen there was a different look about her mouth. The softness had gone from it. When she came into the hall to see me off to the factory, she didn't say but one thing, and somehow it didn't sound like anything but a talking-machine. "It isn't true," she says, and the words kept repeating themselves to me like a tune you get in your head and hum over without knowing what you're doing.

I was going down the hill and kicking up the dust in clouds; it was that day when I heard somebody holler from behind, and I looked back and seen it was Joe Bent. He was almost running, and I could tell by the grin on his nosey face that he had some news.

"I suppose you're sorry you took her in now," he says, with a cigarette bobbing up and down in his lips.

"Who?" I says.

"The invalid," he says, with a mean twist of his mouth and roll of his eye. "Anne Villet," he says. "There ain't many who know about it," he says, "but enough to make it bad," he says. "My wife was told by Mary Birch, the girl who works at the Boss's house," he says.

"What is it?" says I. "Speak up, man," says I. "What's happened?"

"A black bird has roosted on the Boss's front porch," he says. "I thought you'd know about it. Perhaps I oughter say nothing," he says.

"Joe," I says, taking hold of his elbow and turning him

up against that fence this side of the bridge where all them tin signs is tacked, "I don't know anything," I says, "except the girl left our house last night before supper and hasn't come home since. What do you know? Speak up," I says.

He may have seen the look on my face, for he told me then. "Why," he says, "it was this way. The door-bell at the Boss's house rang last night, and Mrs. Elmore, the boss's married daughter, was near the door, and she opened it before the hired girl got there. And there stood Anne Villet," he says. "'Who do you want to see?' she says, seeing the ugly look on the girl's face. 'I want to see him,' says the Villet woman.

"'Who?' " says Mrs. Elmore.

"'Oh, I don't know what he calls himself now,' she says; 'but he will remember me. These muscles and bones has come back to him,' she says. 'We'll have a pretty little scene,' she says."

And says Joe, "Then Mrs. Elmore asks again who the girl meant, but never got a chance to hear the answer, for Bob Harvey, the Boss's son, stepped up from behind. He was red and dizzy, they say. But he says, 'I'll talk to her,' he says. 'Don't have any noise about this, for God's sake!' he says. 'Go in the house, sister,' he says to Mrs. Elmore, and he walked off down across the lawn there and stood a long while talking to the woman under the trees."

And says Joe, "There they talked, and when Bob

Harvey came back into the house and his sister asked him questions. He was excited, but wouldn't answer anything; and the Old Boss come out from the dining room where he'd been smoking his cigar the way he does, and he asked his girl, Mrs. Elmore, what was happening, and she told him, and when the boy started to go out the door again, the Old Boss grabbed him and asked him who the woman was that he could see standing out there under those horse-chestnut trees, and the boy said that didn't mean anything dishonorable to him, and that was all he would tell, and bust away and went out."

"Great Scott!" says I. "Where is Anne Villet now?" I says.

"Oh, she's gone!" says Joe. "The station-master told me she went on the first train this morning. Bob Harvey telegraphed last night to some feller to send five hundred dollars by telegraph, and an answer came with an order, and the operator gave Harvey a statement showing it was coming, and the boy wrote an order on the telegraph company and gave it to Myrick at the Phenix Hotel, and Myrick cashed it for him."

"Well," says I, "he gave her the money, that's plain," I says.

"Of course," says Joe, "that's plain; and if you don't want me to get docked for being late this morning at the time-clock, it's plain I've got to hurry."

So we walked on to the door together. I had a mixture in my feelings right then. I was glad my Katherine

had escaped the feller, and yet I remembered her voice saying, "It isn't true!" and I hated to have to tell her that it was. I wondered what the Old Boss was feeling, and as sure as the world I forgot how I'd been learning to dislike him since he interfered with my girl's happiness, and I kinder felt sorry for him. And I looked in the office as I went toward them bare wooden stairs, and I seen he weren't there.

It wasn't till noon he came down, and then he sent for me. I never seen so much pain on a human face. He was like a man who has been sent up for a thirty-year term. He never raised his eyes at all.

"I suppose you know what I want to see you about," he says, playing with his fingers on the back of his gold watch.

"Yes," I says.

"Who was that woman?" he says. And I told him all I knew. "Does your daughter know anything of this?" he says.

"Only what I know," says I, "and not so much, for she don't know anything about what Joe told me," I says. "She don't believe it against your son," I says. "It's going to be hard to tell her — to tell her that it's a fact."

He looked up at me with a quick shoot of his eyes. "You don't mean —" he begins.

"Yes," I says. "She hasn't seen him, but she still loves him," I says.

"You don't mean it!" says he, and for a long time he was thinking. Then he draws a long breath and pulls down his vest and sits down. "Jim," he says, "I've got two daughters myself. For their sake I'd like to keep this thing quiet. You'll help me?" he says. "Well, you better know it all," he says. "I've told my boy that he could tell me the truth or not call on me to pay his bills. I couldn't get a word out of him except that there was nothing dishonorable to him. Of course he lied to me. I told him so. I told him we were through," he says. "He only said he was sorry I hadn't learned to know him, being that he was my own son. But finally he said that he had borrowed five hundred dollars from his room-mate in college.

"The five hundred he gave to the girl?" I says.

"Yes," says the Boss, biting his lip. "The young fools. His room-mate signed a post-dated check, and hasn't got the money to make good. The boy said that would get his room-mate in trouble. He said of course it would be known among his friends in college, and that it meant he couldn't go back there. He tried to weaken me by telling me that! And we had hot words, and I stood out," he says. "And, Jim," he says, all hunched up in the leather chair, "I guess my boy and me is through," he says.

"I'm sorry," says I; "and I'll try to shut up the talk," I says.

"A rascal and a coward," says he, as I was going out

the door. He acted like a man talking to himself. "A rascal and liar," he says, — "my son."

So that was the story I had to tell my girl that night, and I can see them big eyes of hers looking at me, and I remember how she opened and shut her hands and pressed 'em together and against her throat. She went upstairs when I was through, and she brought down one of them tickets with a string in it that they put in your buttonhole at these country fairs, and I seen that on the back of it was his handwriting, and it said, "For a good girl," like it says on the china mugs they give children. I just caught a look at it. She tore the paste-board into little bits of pieces and dropped 'em into the waste-basket. And after a while she gave a laugh — the kind of laugh I don't like much.

I heard it more than once in those next days. Only once she spoke of Bob Harvey. She had come out to the barn and was patting the horse's nose; and all of a sudden she turned quick to me and said, "If it hadn't been true," she says, "he would have come and told me," she says.

"Yes," I says.

"But if he didn't care for me any more," she says, "he might not care what I thought," she says, and she looked up at me again. "Do you think it was that?" she says.

"You can search me," says I, and I watched her go into the house, where I knew she'd sit over some book

she was reading. She was always a great one for books, — books, books, books, — and in them days she ate 'em up one after another, and would sometimes stop and look out the window an hour at a time, or maybe go up to walk in Turner's Woods, where the leaves had begun to shake down from the trees. I remember I followed her into the front room.

"Girl," I says, "you don't still have any feelings for him?" I says.

"No!" she says, clear and strong, and I felt a heap better to hear her say it.

Annie was pretty sure of it, too. She had packed up all the Villet girl's things and put 'em in the attic, and it seemed as if, when that was done, we had a clean slate. It only goes to show that a feller can't tell.

It was the Boss who told me a week or two after that, and I couldn't keep it. I told right out, when I got home, that when Bob Harvey had gone away he hadn't gone back to finish his college.

"Where did he go?" says Katherine and Annie.

"Nobody knows," says I. "He just disappeared."

"Nobody knows?" says Annie.

"No," says I. "He's dropped out of sight like a rat gone into a hole," I says. "I guess we've all seen the last of him," I says; "and little I knew we would," I says, "when he stopped me last week and asked me if Katherine had heard about the trouble and whether she believed it."

“What did you tell him?” says the girl, with the words in her throat and coming out very slow.

“Why, I told him the truth,” I says. “I said you not only believed it, but, more than that, you knew it, and I said he probably knew that once his father had told me that my daughter weren’t good enough for him, and that now it had turned out that he weren’t good enough for you, or any other girl; and I thought he was going to make a bluff at hitting me with his closed fist, but he only said, ‘It’s a big farce to believe in anybody,’ just as if he was the one who’d been injured, and he walked away. It was that day he left town,” I says.

“You told him that!” says Katherine.

“Yes,” I says. “What’s the matter? Wasn’t it true?”

But she only nodded, and covered her face with her hands. It is strange how hard it is for some women to root up things out of their hearts. By and by she raised her head and says, “Nobody stood by him — not one,” she says, and Annie and I looked at each other.

CHAPTER XVI

THEN the letter came. It was that very night that the *Argus* was near sudden death.

I was a stockholder in the *Argus* then, though it makes me laugh when I think of myself as a publisher. It was The Imperial Press and Printing Company. It's the Marden County *Argus* right here in this little factory town. It has a printing-press with the hip disease or something like that, eight shelves of old advertising cuts, a stack of cardboard, and an inch and a half of gray, mossy-looking dust over everything, and over the files of the paper in particular.

Old Edward Knowles is the editor, and I guess about the sole asset. He has got a kind of a pursy look to his mouth from blowing dust off things. I don't know how old he is, but he can sit on a box and blink his old eyes at the dirty ceiling and talk kinder personal about the election of Lincoln, — though he was a journeyman printer then, — and tell what the platforms and majorities were for every year, I don't know how far back. And then he'll go down to the station with his big trousers flapping on his little legs to see who come in on the train, and maybe get a couple of items, as he always

calls 'em, for the "Local News" and "Personal Mention."

Somehow I never think of the old man without thinking of Mazie Marcou and her smile and her high-heel shoes and her yeller hair. It's that easy to be fooled about people! And it come to me as I was going down from the noon meal at home to-day how I got into the scrape with them two myself.

I remember well enough what a time I had waiting for my money. I'd sold the old man a lot of land up on Maple Street for two hundred and fifty dollars, and he paid me along two or three dollars at a time, and then wait and then fifty cents. You know there's some folks ain't got enough money sense to buy a nickle cigar and come away with the right change. They ain't to blame, and I couldn't take the land away from him. I couldn't find the courage. The old man had built a cottage on it, and he and his old lady lived there and liked to sit on the steps evenings in summer and bow to folks, and in a case like that I guess I ain't got a lot of money sense either, mortgage or no mortgage.

He says to me: "Jim, I'll tell you the truth. I never had subscribers so hard to collect from as this summer," he says. "They've never been so complimentary about the paper before," he says, "and that's a bad sign sure," he says. "I took twenty of 'em out on the Camden Road for potatoes and wood, and even them is slow. You know I'd like to pay you, but somehow I guess you

better take a couple of thousand shares of stock in The Imperial Company," he says. "I own the whole thing now," he says, "and never did understand much about corporation finance, anyhow, though enough to know how bad Joe Burton rolled me out when I bought the company."

"How much is a share worth?" I says.

"I'll tell you the truth, Jim," says he. "I don't know. I never give it no study, like I give the railroad company's figures. I got my suspicions," he says, "and I've had 'em for twenty years," he says, "but I ain't done nothing to confirm 'em, for the paper is an old friend and I love it, and I ain't going to do nothing to reflect on it no way."

Well, of course I had to laugh. It was worth standing a loss to see the wrinkles on the old man's face and his fingers scratching in his gray hair, and find an honest feller like him, who meant to pay his bills and almost never got around to it.

You know how them things work in your mind. Why, I thought of fifty things in a minute. I remembered how my Annie had noticed a picture of the old man's son hanging over his desk in the printing-shop — a picture of a young feller with a big tie and a sheepish smile and hair all brushed up and greased, maybe. And how she'd found out that the boy was drowned when he was twenty-one. And I remembered them editorials I'd read in the *Argus* sometimes. They had a lot of long

words, but even some of the men at the factory read 'em and would say, "That's right!" or "That's going some!" or "That's slinging the words all right!" And I thinks to myself how the old man was always writing hardest for the under dog, and how he must have put himself to it. There was sweat in them editorials — especially when he was writing about some man in town who died. It didn't make any difference who, either. You could see that the old man felt as if every feller who died had been just as straight and good and smart as the greatest man that ever lived. And he'd make you half believe it, too, even if it was a feller like Dave Pierson.

So, as I say, I looked at old Ed and remembered how he used to talk about the power of the press, as he called it, and the sphere of a writer's influence and the like of that, and go without a summer suit of clothes just so's he could see his way clear to buy a new set of type which he never paid for. So I come to the conclusion that I'd take the stock, and even if the *Argus* weren't a money-maker, there'd be some satisfaction being connected with a "moulder of public opinion," as old Knowles used to say. And that was the way I got into it.

There was a lot of guying here at the factory when the boys found it out. "Don't forget the Sunday edition with the colored pictures," says Ben; and Nellie Conroy in the stitching-room was always stopping me to say,

"Mr. Hands, I hear you have a new correspondent at Turner's Four Corners, where the sawmill is closed down"; or maybe Joe Bent, who's boss of the packing-room and mean as burnt rubber, would yell at me: "They say you've got a new subscriber, Jim. That ought to double your advertising rates, old man"; and the like of that.

But I didn't care. The old man was happy, and the paper was coming out and had a circulation of seven or eight hundred or something around there, and the folks that got it in and around this muddy little factory town used to read it right through, including cards of thanks and "in memorium" notices, and the plate matter inside that come from Chicago all set up with blurred pictures, and the medicine testimonials, and the stories written by women with names like actresses. And they read the "Personal Mention" first and old Knowles's editorials afterward, and they bowed to him a little lower than they would to most folks because he seemed to know something about almost everything.

It was that summer the *Argus* had a close call — the same summer I'm telling about, and the one when my little Mike got dogwood poison, and they had the big election and row over the railroad in this State. We expect to be getting cool weather up in the hills here by that time, and sometimes the frost has turned them maples over there across the river fifty-seven different colors and there's a kind of snap in the air that gets

into the balls of your feet. But that year it was hot! I can just see the heat rising off them railroad tracks! Saturday afternoon you could hear 'em cheering up at the field where our boys was playing the team of college fellers from a camp over at the lake.

I forgot to tell you that I'd bought a chair from a mail-order house. It was one my Annie had picked out from a catalogue, and we was waiting for it and wondering how well it would be made and how it was going to look in our sitting-room, and having all them feelings about owning something new that I sometimes think them who is rich don't know anything about. I'd gone down to the station to see if it had come on the noon freight, and being as it was late and the four-ten train coming up from the Junction most due, I met old Knowles tightening up his old blue necktie, as he always did whenever he was going to speak to strangers or meet a train for "Items."

He had a way when anything was on his mind of never saying, "How are you?" or nothing, but just walking up to you and looking at you from under them gray, bushy eyebrows, and then firing off almost like a gun. And that day he walks up, mopping his forehead with a big silk handkerchief, and he hauls a folded paper out of his pocket from among the bunch of bills and receipts and fire-alarm cards and advertising copy, and he shook it out and says: "There! I've got something to say in the paper that comes out to-day about that!"

"What's the matter?" I says. "It ain't anything

but a poster for a theatrical troupe," I says, grinning. "And, I says, pointing with my finger, "it says the Mazie Marcou Company presents Mazie Marcou, the Kohinoor Soubrette, together with eight high-class acts, including the New York Comedy Four in the screaming farce, 'The Door with the Keyhole.' And here's a picture of Mazie herself, looking happy and well set up, if I do say it. Ain't it proper," says I, "considering the age we live in?" I says.

"It's proper enough," he says. "That ain't what I'm talking about. But these shows come here to town and they ain't any good and they pervert the people's taste and haven't got any dramatic merit. Now I can remember seeing Booth — and anyhow, I saw this Marcou show down at the Junction when I went last Wednesday. It's awful poor. A woman like that ought to be ashamed. Her voice is awful. She ain't so graceful a dancer as Jenny Wilder, who sorts the mail at the post-office, and Jenny's the worst I ever see to step on men's feet and wrestle with wall chairs or tip over the lemonade. We're moulding public opinion," he says. "And the power of the press ain't got the backbone of a tomato-worm," he says, "if it can't speak out what *I* think. So I've wrote an editorial and told our people what they're getting. I've run it right under a red-hot one about the way the M. U. and R. Railroad is trying to own this State and corrupt our representative form of republican government," he says. "We'll have a great

issue this time!" he says. "It'll be out in half an hour," he says, "in time to catch the R.F.D.," and with that he pulled out one of them slips he called galley proof. "I always write best under pressure," he says. "Read that!"

Well, I oughter remember that editorial from beginning to end,—hide, hair, and shoe leather. It's funny how little things will raise a big stew that you never expect. But I can't think of it all just as it was written. It said that there was plenty of reasons why people ought not to go to these cheap one-night-stand shows, but the chief of all was that it lowered the standard of the drama, and if any proof was wanting of the fact, all you had to do was to go to "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and see how it was growing poorer and poorer every year. And then it sailed off and turned a couple of big circles like a hawk and then it dived down on to Mazie Marcou. And them words I remember as plain as if I had 'em before me. I've learned 'em since.

Let's see. "The *piece de resistance* of this grotesque aggregation," it says, "which for the foolish mortals whose vapid tastes are so whetted by tawdry posters that they would pay out their inheritance for tickets (which are not freshly printed, but used over and over again, carrying germs of disease from hand to hand — nay, from city to city) is Miss Marcou," it says, or something like that. "We are well informed," it says, "that dramatic criticism is not libel or actionable at the

bar of justice, but even were it so, we would not hesitate to say that we would hate to have been hanging since Miss Marcou come of age. Her claims to art," it says, "are as false as her multitudinous and poorly concealed aids to beauty. The modest peacock, who never advanced a boast of sweet voice, produces by comparison with this songstress a heavenly melody, and the dancing which attends the outburst resembles the antics a hen makes dancing on asphalt when it's soft, sticky, and maybe hot. Of course some may like to see this. We don't! We never attend such exhibitions. *Non est de gustibus disputantum!*" it says.

"I thought you said you seen the show," I says.

"Oh," he says, "'twas only as a dramatic critic," he says.

"And are you going to show this to the lady when the train comes in?" says I, hearing the engine whistle at the covered bridge. And with that a funny smile come on to his face and he says, "No," he says. "But it's not because I'm discreet or cautious or nothing," he says. "To tell you the whole truth, Jim," he says, "I'm sorry that editorial is in the *Argus*. Maybe she's bold. Maybe she's bleached her hair. Maybe all I've said is true. But the *Argus* hasn't never attacked the gentle sex before, whether they were gentle or not," he says. "I guess I must have been inspired," he says. "Inspiration is the big danger in being literary," says he.

And yet when I first set eyes on Mazie as she got down

from the train, I didn't think he'd done her any injustice or nothing. You could tell she was leader. The other members of the troupe seemed like last-year's bird-nests, but she looked like one of them lace valentines. She had a dress covered with ribbons and this and that and a pink umbrella and a smile that was fixed like the look on the face of one of them bold figures in the window of a department store. Her expression was kinder hard, I thought. And as I say, she had that faded daisy appearance. I thought there wouldn't be no sympathy lost between me and her unless she lost it. And that goes to show how much you can tell.

I suppose I'd noticed more about her if it hadn't been for a feller that got off the smoker. Sometimes I think the way things is fixed in this world is like it is on a real stage with somebody you don't see thinking up them plots and making us jump through the hoops or anything that comes into the plot-feller's head, though I'd not like to have you tell Father Ryan I said so.

This new feller weren't no ordinary specimen to get off the train at this town. If the Old Boss hadn't left the factory for a few days for a trip with his youngest daughter, I'd have thought it was somebody come up to see him. You know how it is — this feller was maybe thirty-five or forty, and his hair was brushed just so and a little gray at the corners, and he had a kind expression, and his clothes weren't flashy none, but they fitted him good-natured, and his travelling-bag was the kind that

cost money. You've seen them mustaches cropped off — he had one of 'em. Nobody knew him, either. Old Ed Knowles asked everybody at the station. He was crazy for an "item."

"Well," says the old man at last, "I guess I've got to give it up. He certainly looks like a Congressman, and I ain't sure I ain't done him an injustice even then. He's going to the Phenix Hotel, anyhow. This is vegetable-hash and batter-cakes night there," he says. "I'd have a good mind to eat there and set at his table. The only trouble is that I have to go to the shop to-night and knock down the forms," he says. Little he knew what was in the air when he said it.

I didn't know myself, of course. I didn't know when I come down on to Main Sreet after supper. I remember the stores were all lit up, and a new display in the window of the New York Emporium, and wagons in from the country drawn by horses with their heads bowed down, and thunder sounding off in the hills up the valley, and boys shouting and people saying, "Ain't it hot?" to each other, and the fans going in the ceiling of the barber shop. I remember that night.

And I seen a light in the shop of The Imperial Press and Printing Company, and so I dropped in. I had a sort of sense of ownership on account of them two thousand shares of stock. If you've ever been in there, you know there's an outer office — a kind of waiting-room with an old station bench in it and a round stove that hasn't

known a fire since anybody can remember, and colored pictures of steamboats with advertising frames. Then there's a thin partition of wood and a door. Well, the door goes into what old Ed used to call his sanctum. There's an old brass lamp that hangs down from a beam over the table, and a steel engraving of Abraham Lincoln, and a desk with agricultural reports on the top, and papers piled on it so's nobody could ever write there without using a rake and a shovel first. And when I opened the door, there sat the slick-looking feller with the cropped mustache that we saw get off the train.

The minute he heard the door he got up as if he'd been caught shaking money out of a child's bank, and he looked at me, sizing me up in his sharp-eyed way.

"Jim," says old Ed, "come right in," he says. "You own a part of this paper, and there ain't any reason why you shouldn't sit down. This gentleman is Mr. Paul R. Otis, and he represents the M. & U. Railroad," he says.

Before I could say a word, the feller's face bust into a smile. He seemed to have sized me up as if I weren't nothing to be afraid of. And he stuck out a warm fist and was very hearty.

"Yes, yes," he says, finally, "this is very pleasant. And I suppose I ought to explain to you, Mr. Hands, that I'm in a sort of confidential capacity, and act for the management of the road in a general way. Yes, yes," he says, for it seemed to be a habit with him when he was trying to be agreeable. "Yes, yes," he says, "I

come up to this town especially to see the owner of the *Argus* and Mr. Knowles, the able editor of the paper."

Ed kinder smiled at that. He was pleased. "Why, we don't have a very large circulation," he says.

"No?" says Otis, plucking at his mustache. "But apparently the little paper has some influence — a great deal of influence; and the political situation is such that we are especially anxious that no mistake be made in sending the right representative from this district. These editorials I've been reading in the *Argus* are pretty severe," he says, and touched all the finger-tips of one hand with all those of the other. "Yes, yes," he says, "I know that there have been some things to criticise in corporation management in the past. I'm the first to admit it," he says, "but on the other hand, too much agitation," he says, "especially when founded upon a misrepresentation of the facts — Yes, yes," he says. "And I don't like to see you making mistakes, Mr. Knowles," he says. "I thought we could talk it over," he says.

The old man took his glasses out of his case with its purple lining, and he wiped 'em on his ink-spotted silk handkerchief, and he set 'em on his nose and kinder bent down under the old brass lamp to look at the other feller.

"Go on," he says.

"Yes, yes," says Otis, "it pains us very much to have you adopt the policy you have written into your

editorials, Mr. Knowles. It makes us feel that perhaps we haven't carried enough advertising in your paper," he says. "It makes us feel that we ought to come to some business arrangement, perhaps. Couldn't you see your way clear to give us a chance to show you that your editorials are not only hostile and dangerous to our welfare, but also unjust?" he says.

He was a slick-talking feller. His voice was soft and sweet, like water running over pebbles, and he had a smile that looked as real as Father Ryan's. Old Ed leaned forward again and he smiled, too, but I seen his hand on the table shut so hard the veins stood out, and all the old rheumatism joints were shiny, and I knew what it meant.

"I believe we could come to some kind of an understanding," he says, kinder whispering.

"Oh, yes, yes," says Otis, letting his finger-tips slide out and rubbing his hands together. "We would not expect a hostile attitude from the *Argus*," he says, "and we would expect to pay fifty dollars a month for a year, and you could give us any space that was convenient. Naturally enough we wouldn't want to do this with a hostile agitating paper," he says. "You would understand that," he says. "We'd rely on a verbal agreement. Fifty dollars a month."

At that old man Knowles let out a kind of a sigh, and he leaned back in his chair till it creaked, and he began to rub the arms of it.

Finally, he says, beginning in a kind of a whisper, "Mr. Otis," he says, "I ain't a young man, and I've been editor of this paper for a good many years. I never had no such advertising contract as that before. It would almost double the income of the *Argus*," he says. "Yes, Jim," he says, looking at me, "that's what it would do, sure," he says. "But," he says, standing up and putting his hands behind him, "there ain't been a word I've ever written for the *Argus* that didn't come from my heart. If anybody seen it there, they might not believe it, but, by Jingo, they knew I believed it! They knew I wouldn't drive up to their door and lie to 'em in the face, and they knew I wouldn't do it in the *Argus*. The paper ain't made any money," he says. "Neither have I. My wife's had to get along sometimes without a dress to go to the strawberry festivals or the like of that," he says. "She didn't mind, I guess," he says, thoughtful, and putting his hands in his pockets. "Anyhow," he says, "I've run this paper, and if I did it for money, I ain't got any. I ain't got much of anything except the influence the *Argus* has. I ain't even got any children now, except the *Argus*. It ain't much. It ain't large. But it's a virtuous daughter, Mr. Otis, and I ain't going to sell her. I love this paper."

And with that he brought his finger down as if he had a charge of powder and shot loaded in it. "Mr. Otis," he says, "I know you. You are one of these accelerators — one of these public-opinion agents. You're somebody's

dog. You smile. But it's a fake," he says. "There ain't any smile in your soul," he says. "You're bought by somebody. I ain't bought by nobody," he says, making his finger. And I seen right then that old Ed weren't short and bowlegged and bothered with bills. I seen he was the goods.

"So," he says, "there's some distinctions," he says, "even in a democracy," he says. "Mr. Otis, this is my sanctum. There ain't a piece of mahogany or ten dollars' worth of furniture in it. But it's my sanctum, and you ain't welcome in it. Your profession is corruption!" he says.

The feller must have had a hide like an oak-tanned engine belt. He got kinder red, and his smile kinder turned on to one side of his face as if it hurt him and he was trying to get rid of it. Perhaps he was used to taking slaps in spite of his fine clothes and nice-parted hair. It ain't necessary for a slave to go barefoot in these days. He stuck his hand into his pocket and pulled out a fountain-pen and twirled it in his fingers, and when he spoke it was just as soft as ever.

"I'm sorry you take that attitude," he says, "especially as you're fond of the *Argus*. Maybe I can make you see the matter in a different light, Mr. Knowles. I don't want to do anything that would cause you or Mr. Hands any hardship. But as you know, you put up your stock in the *Argus* at the bank last April. You indorsed it over and gave a contract for a forfeiture of

your equity in case you failed to pay for four hundred dollars of notes when they came due. And they're due before noon to-morrow. In this State the forfeiture is good," he says.

"Well, the boys at the bank will renew for me," says old Ed.

The Otis feller grinned. "Yes, yes," he said, "the boys, as you call 'em, have been pretty nice to you, haven't they? But you see the railroad has some influence, too. We do a lot of business with this little bank here, and I just bought your notes, and I've got the majority of your stock in my valise at the hotel. And I ain't going to renew the contract. I guess you've got the last of your credit," he says. "You might get the money," he says, "if it weren't for the fact that the average man would advance you more sympathy than money," he says. "Perhaps I'll own the *Argus* to-morrow," says he, slow and smiling.

CHAPTER XVII

I TELL you I never see such a look as come into old Ed's face. The paper was the only thing he had in the world. He was rooted right into it. And what he heard turned him white as your collar.

"Well," says Paul R. Otis, "can't you see your way clear to a change in policy, Mr. Knowles? Of course, in that case, we'd let the little debt go for a while."

I seen the old man open and shut his hands. He kinder looked around the office as though he was seeing it for the last time, and he picked up a copy of the paper and looked at one side and turned it over and looked at the other.

"No," he says, "you can buy the press and the name and the files," he says, "and you can kill the *Argus*. You can bury it. But you can't buy the *Argus*. For the *Argus* is me," he says, and put his head in his hands.

"Is that the way you feel, Mr. Hands?" says the other feller, turning to me.

"No, it ain't," I says. "My feeling is different. His is mental. But my feeling is all in my body," I says. "I'm itching," I says, "I'm itching to wipe the floor with you."

I think I frightened the feller. He got up, and just as

he took a step, the door from the outer office opened and in come a flash of blue ribbons and pink hat. It was Mazie Marcou, as sure as you're a foot high!

"Well," she says, smoothing her yeller hair with one hand, "I'm a lady," she says, "but you can tie a can to me if I ever saw anything to beat this," she says. "It's funny what you can see when you ain't got a gun," she says, "even in a little burg like this," she says. "You're Mr. Knowles, the editor and dramatic critic?" she says.

The old man looked up and nodded.

"Well, say," she says, "when I come in and heard voices and sat down outside, I was loaded with some emotional acting. I had a speech," she says, "with class to it. You roasted our show. I ain't fussing about that. We like that talk about our not being a high-brow show. It draws the crowd. We've sold out the whole house to-night on what you wrote," she says. "It's something more personal," she says, "and I want you to know I don't care whether I sing like a peacock or dance like a hen on hot tar. Them things is nothing to me. I've been married twice and I've heard 'em before, especially from the last one. But there's one thing," she says, "that troubles me," she says, "and it ain't the peacock business. No," she says, "I come in for an explanation. You called me something that don't sound good to me. It sounds like an insult, and I don't stand for insults from no dramatic critic."

“What was it?” says old Ed, looking like a man who has been shot full of trouble from first one barrel and then the other; “what was it?” he says.

“‘*De gustibus,*’” says Mazie, flushing red. “The orchestra leader’s an Eyetalian, but even he, who has got an awful long string of them abusives, couldn’t answer for this ‘*gustibus,*’” she says.

I saw old Ed reach for a book as if he was going to show her, but she stopped him.

“Some other time, old man,” she says. “I’ll take your word for it. And from what I could hear sitting outside, you’ve got a swell lot of trouble already,” she says. “I heard this gent here, I heard what he said,” she says, giving Otis a look, and turning up her nose full of contempt. “I heard him blackmailing you,” she says. And then she turned again to Otis, and says, “Do you think you can get away with it?” she says.

Otis puts his thumbs in his vest pockets and whistled. “Well,” he says, “I can’t understand how you can take that view of it,” he says. “My dear madam,” he says, “do you want to advance the four hundred dollars?” he says.

“Do you think I’d be working on this circuit if I had four hundred dollars?” she says. “Oh, no,” she says. “Not this particular Mazie Marcou. But,” she says, looking toward old Knowles, “seeing you say there ain’t no harm in this ‘*gustibus,*’ let bygones be bygones,”

she says. "I like you, Mr. Knowles," she says. "I think you're on the level, and anybody that's on the level these days has got me pushing a button on their time-clock. So enter Mazie Marcou, playing title part in the 'Power of the Press.' Villain thwarted by harmless hands of womankind. There's the scenario."

"The what?" I says.

"Scenario — plot," says she. "Come with me," she says, pointing to me. "I'm late now. My show goes on at eight-thirty. Don't pass off into a dream, mister," she says. "You and I are going to pull off a sketch. We're going to show this feller Otis that this squeeze-out business won't go in a good old U.S. town."

"What are you going to do?" I says, half getting up.

"Ask no questions and follow the old breeze," she says, in a queenly fashion, and rustled out the door with her blue ribbons flying, and her hands at work unhooking the buttons at the back.

She said something to the man at the door of the Opera House, and he says, looking at me: "It'll be all right. Just speak to me when you come back, mister. The show starts in a few minutes, and we've got a swell act for an opener." "I'll be back in time," I says. "I only want to tell a feller to let my wife know where I've gone," I says, and ran across the street. It was just in front of the post-office I met Katherine. You'd have thought she had been walking into paradise.

"Oh!" she says when she saw me. "Look! Look!" and she held out a piece of paper.

I took it and I seen it was like the other. No date, no place — nothing but his handwriting and the one word "Katherine"!

I looked her square in the eyes. They were shining and wet. I could see 'em in the light from the store windows.

"Girl!" I says. "You don't still love him?"

She never flinched. "Yes," she says, kinder defiant, "I do."

"After all those things?" I says.

"Yes," she says, "and more."

"Katherine!" I says.

"What is it, father?" she says, very quiet. I was choking. "Nothing!" I says. "Tell your mother I can't be home till after ten," I says, and I walked back to the Opera House steps.

The feller there pushed me in and says, "Sit down anywhere, old scout." He talked to me the way a fight promoter talks to the chief of police.

The hall was full, just as she said, and everybody was hot and fanning themselves with hats or programs. I seen Dave Pierson and his wife in the front row, for he is the kind that always comes an hour beforehand with a newspaper and a package of chewing-gum so's he can get the best seat and read and chew and watch the hall fill up. There was a feller on the stage juggling with

Indian clubs, all covered with tinsel, while the musicians were keeping time with him playing the "Anvil Chorus." And the next feller to me — a feller that works in the packing-room — was saying in a loud whisper: "That's all right. That's a good one. My brother-in-law used to be a juggler for a living, and I know what I'm talking about." And then finally the feller on the stage runs off light and easy and graceful on his toes, and when they clapped, he come out again and bowed this way and that, just as if he really cared, and maybe he did. And then they turned the lights out and threw a calcium circle on the curtain the way they do when it's going to be a woman in a swell dress.

I kinder knew it would be Mazie, and it was. She didn't look half so tired, and she looked a heap younger. She had on a costume about the shade of them Baltimore orioles you see in summer — a kind of an orange and black, and a diamond necklace which explained the calcium light, I guess. It made 'em look real. She certainly looked fine. And she sang a song about a picture on the mantelpiece or over the parlor stove or something. That was sad and dragged, you understand. And then back she come, walking on springs and bouncing around and snapping her fingers and singing a song with lots of ginger called "Aviating Anna," about a black girl who wanted to fly, till you was moving your feet in time to it, and every hair on your head was a jew's-harp. Maybe she was better than usual. Maybe

her heart was light, so to speak. Anyhow, she got the factory boys. They seemed to catch her feeling, and they just hollered for more.

And she comes out smiling the same as ever, and she put up her hand for quiet, and her face changed and you could see she weren't an actress any more, but just a woman. And she began to tell 'em the story of old Ed Knowles, and I hung over the back of the chair in front of me just listening and listening.

She told it good — how the old man had always been working to make the paper go, and writing what he believed was true, and sitting up late, maybe, to turn out something the best he could do, and how he was on the level. I couldn't see how she knew so much about old Ed. And she couldn't. It was just that she knew things, like my Annie does. And she told 'em of how she'd gone to the *Argus* office; and she told right out about this feller from the railroad, and how he weren't satisfied with corrupting politics, but wanted to make public opinion rotten, too; and she told about how he threatened to take the paper for a debt of four hundred dollars, and how it would leave the old man without anything to do; and she said the paper was his baby, and he'd always brought it up and nursed it and sweated for it and got wrinkled for it.

She certainly handed it out, and she didn't seem to be much educated, either. It was a surprise to me. I guess it don't take education. At first, of course,

everybody thought it was going to end in a joke — something funny. But by and by, when she had come forward and was talking strong and hard and worked up, you could see the wet places in the corners of her eyes, and in the calcium light they was just like them glass diamonds, — only real. So everybody was still, like the woods is at night. They listened to beat the band.

“Well,” she says finally, with a kind of a laugh, “you wonder what I’m talking for. I’ll tell you,” says she. “I’m betting on you,” she says, “you who sit out there — everyone of you. I’m betting that men and women’ll do the right thing. The ticket man counted you when you come in. There’s four hundred and seventy-five of you, and I want four hundred and seventy-five new subscriptions to the *Argus!*” she says.

She waited a minute, and then she walks to the front of the stage and pointed to a boy, and smiled enough to take the chill off Joe Bent, who’s the meanest man in the factory. “Do you want to help me?” she says.

“Sure,” says the boy, and everybody seemed kinder glad to stamp and whistle.

And then she picked out Dave Pierson, and then an old man whose name I forgot, but he lives out on the road to Turner’s Corner.

“Boys,” she says to ’em, “the people here is going to write their names and address on a piece of paper and hand ’em in with the money. Nothing but cash

goes to-night. Them that ain't got it can borrow. And now, boys, do you see this rose I've got here? The one that brings in the biggest list gets that rose. Go to it!" she says.

Well, the funny part of it was that that rose was made of tissue-paper. You could have bought ten of 'em for a quarter, and yet Dave Pierson and the boy and the old man was all sweating when they got through and out of breath, and red and anxious and trying to separate money from paper and looking sheepish. The rose weren't worth anything. It only goes to show, don't it!

And finally they were through, and Mazie told 'em Dave had won, and she leaned down and pinned the rose on him and put her arms around his neck and made everybody laugh except Dave's wife, who was mad. And Mazie asked the people if Dave was to be trusted to give the money to old Ed, and they laughed some more, and so she gave the cash and the pieces of paper to Dave. Everybody just let loose, laughing and happy and noisy like people get once in a long while.

And then she come forward again, and she couldn't seem to speak so loud or steady. She just said, "I'm much obliged. This is the best sketch I ever put on," she says. "You see I was right," she says, "about people," she says. "They're the goods!" says she. "I like you all," she says, and them words gagged her. So she ran out. And the man had thrown the

circled of light on again. Great Guns! didn't it look empty!

Well, sir, Dave come over to the *Argus* office with the money. And there was four hundred and seven names and addresses and four hundred and eighteen dollars!

We counted it out on the old table, and had to begin all over again two or three times, for Dave was always trying to tell old man Knowles how it happened, and old Ed was asking questions and staring like he couldn't believe much of it, and then Dave would tell it all over again, and tell about how he won the rose, and lie very strong about how pretty this Mazie Marcou was. When he'd told it enough to us, he run out to tell it and show his paper rose at the barber shop, where they was just closing up.

And after a while he come back. "Well," he says, with a kind of a sigh, "the train's gone. She's left town."

That seemed to wake up old Ed. "Gone!" he says. "Ain't I going to see her?"

"No," says Dave, "I guess not. They're going clear through to New York, I hear."

Old Ed studied for a while. "My God!" he says. "If she died, what a chance I'd have for an obituary!" he says.

But he didn't say any more for a long time, and when he spoke again, Dave had looked at his watch and gone out. So the old man put his hand on mine, across the table, and he says, "If we can elect Bames instead of

the railroad candidate, it will be the *Argus* that done it — the power of the press, eh? ”

“It will not,” says I. “It will be ‘*gustibus.*’ ”

The old man laughed, but he didn’t say anything. After a while he got up and looked at the engraving of Lincoln and straightened it on the wall, and blew the dust off some old books, and walked around the room looking at everything as if he’d been away for ten years and just got back. And finally he sat down at the table and gave a sigh, the way a kid does when he’s put to bed, and he kinder leaned forward with his head on his arms. That’s the way I left him — leaning over the table under the old brass lamp — in the sanctum.

As I walked home a cold wind was blowing down from them mountains way up the valley. The weather had changed in an hour. I could see my breath on the air, and the leaves made a dry noise on the trees. I knew it meant autumn was coming over the ridge up there in the north. Many is the time I’ve seen it come, and there’s a smell in the wind that tells you — just the way you know a parade is coming by the sound of music and the mumble of the people on the curb.

I thought all the lights in the house would be out before I got home, except for the one the wife always leaves in the hall when I’m away, but when I’d walked by the edge of Jerry Pollock’s boundary wall I seen the front room was lit and I could see somebody’s shadow moving back and forth across the curtain.

When Annie met me at the door she explained in a whisper. "It's the Boss," she says.

"At this time of night?" I says.

"Yes," says she, "he just come. He says he must see Katherine," she says. "I didn't know what to do, Jim. The girl had gone up to her room. I told him to wait a minute and you'd be back. And oh, Jim, what do you suppose has happened now?" she says.

"I don't know," I says, and walked through the door into the light.

The old man's hair was in a thousand tangles where he'd run his fingers through it.

"Jim," he says, "I can rely on you and your wife to say nothing about this. It would get the post-master into a lot of trouble. But he knows my boy's handwriting," he says, "and when the office closed to-night he stopped in and told me your girl had got a letter from him. He never noticed the writing till he handed it through the window to her."

Somehow I could feel the back of my neck getting hot. "I don't like the methods you use," I says, forgetting everything. "Why don't you hire a detective to watch us?" I says.

"I have hired one to find out where my boy has gone, and he gave it up," says he. "Jim," he says, "I don't want to watch you or anybody in your family," he says. "I wouldn't take my boy back if I knew where he was. I just want to know so as to know,

that's all," says he; "and I came here to-night in a hurry because I want to see that envelope," he says. "I was afraid it might get destroyed before I could get a look at the postmark."

"The letter wasn't addressed to us," says my Annie with a toss of her head; "I will call my daughter. It was her letter, and you can ask her."

He looked from me to Annie and back again. A little smile came into his face. "I'm sorry," he says. "Would it be too much trouble?"

At that Annie went out for the girl, and I can see Katherine now as she came in that door. She had put on one of them things the women call house dresses that are soft and hang in folds and have ribbons tacked on here and there like tails at a donkey-party — but one of them light-colored things and soft. It fell apart at the neck and showed her bare throat, and slipped back from her wrists and showed her arms. There was a happy look in her eyes and a smile on her mouth, and you'd never known she'd had a evil day in her life.

He looked at her, and after a minute he moved his foot and says, "The letter!"

"Good evening, Mr. Harvey," she says, and smiled. I guess he seen his mistake, because he blinked his eyes a couple of times the way he does when somebody gets the best of him, and he kind of bowed.

"You spoke of this letter," she says, holding it up. "As you know, sir, I didn't encourage him to write it.

It's not very long, anyway," she says, "but I think you would be interested. See!" she says, "it's just one word. It's my name."

She held it out to him, and I was kind of surprised that he looked at it. "It's like somebody calling, isn't it?" she says.

"The envelope is what I want to see," says he, with a growl. "What was the postmark?"

"Mr. Harvey," she says, "now you are speaking of another thing entirely!"

I seen him raise his eyebrows, but she just leaned back against the door-post. "Before I show you that," she says, "I'd like to ask you a question. We are very simple people and we reason in simple ways," she says. "Suppose you see that postmark, — for that's all there is left to see besides my name and address, — what will you do?"

"I don't understand," he says, looking nervous.

"Will you try to find him?" says she. "Will you give him the money to clear himself with his friends?" she says. "Will you make him go back to college and face the stories they may tell about him or believe about him? Will you make him act like a man? Will you find out what he owes to Anne Villet and make him pay that, too, in whatever way it can be done? Will you tell him that now is the time he needs you most, and that you will stand behind him?" she says. "Will you tell him you are sorry you didn't stand behind

from the beginning and all through — to the end?" she says.

"No!" says he, brushing the air with his hand and settling his neck in his collar. "No, I won't! Nor would anybody else."

She gave a little laugh. "I would," she says, very soft.

I suppose Annie and I both moved, but the Old Boss spoke first. "After you know all you know?" he says.

"Yes," she says. I remember then we could hear the clock in the Opera House striking the hour, and when it was through we heard the tick of the clock on our wall.

"Yes," she says, as if she was thinking aloud, "it's easy to stick to those you ought to stick to — while it's easy. There may be lots of pretty things in affection," she says; "it's only love that's brave," she says.

The Old Boss acted as if he hadn't heard right. "You mean that after all this time, and in spite of everything, you love him?" he says.

She smiled and says, "I'm not sure it is in spite of everything," she says. "It may be because of everything," she says, and marked a place on the carpet with the toe of one of her slippers.

"Well," she says, finally, looking up with them big clear eyes, "either you or I have got to stand by him now. He needs one of us. You've said you won't.

Well, Mr. Harvey, once you told me I had too little to give him. And yet — ” she says, and stopped. “And yet,” she says again, “now,” she says, “I’m the only one that can or will give him — all. And so,” she says, “although the envelope with the postmark is of no value to most people, I will keep it,” she says, and she bowed her head and went out the door, and not a stair creaked as she went up.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE Boss looked at me and he looked at Annie. He never said anything—he put his hat on and walked out. I seen his back as it turned the gate-post, and I seen he had his head bent over like a man who's thinking as he walks.

A long talk we had when he was gone, and Annie and I made up our minds that we had a fight on our hands to prevent Katherine from carrying out any of her notions and wasting herself on such a feller as the Boss's son.

"An awful cost!" says my Annie, with tears in her eyes. "It mustn't be! She must forget him! I'm going to send down and have my mother come up again," she says. "Not to tell her," she says, "but just to have her here. And you and I must be firm with Katherine," she says.

But when either of us tried to make any progress in those next few days, there was nothing accomplished. Katherine would only say, "I'm so tired with all the talk about it," or "Why do you worry about me?" or the like of that, and then maybe would sing a bit of a tune.

The Boss was worrying himself. He told me. "By

thunder, Jim," he says, "watch your girl," he says. "I'm not talking for myself now, the way I did once. I'm talking for you and your wife and her." And he used to go by the house sometimes as if it was just by accident, and stop a minute. He seemed to want to keep his eye on our family. Somehow Katherine would always manage to dodge him, but it was his coming there that got him acquainted with old Mrs. Byrnes, and I'm not sure it didn't teach something, too.

My mother-in-law's father was a stone-mason most of his life, as I've told you, and he had an arm like a piece of tarred tow-line. But it weren't anything so hard and gristly and snappy as what was in my mother-in-law's head. What she don't know is a plenty, for she never had no schooling, lived out in service, and come over here as a girl, with one dress and a basket of seed potatoes. But what she don't know leaves a whole lot of room for her to do her thinking in, and sometimes a mind like that will shoot a good deal straighter, not being confused with too many targets.

The crust of her pies, however, would have made a goat wish for oyster-shells, and there was often enough salt on the fried eggs she cooked to give yer a big surprise. And the way she will dress when she goes to church! It is all in black, with a big rustle, and looks uncomfortable on her two hundred pounds. It makes you feel as if you'd eaten too big a dinner just to look at her. And she has a heavy foot around the house,

but there is a hand on her that kinder tells the story of lifting thousands of brooms and kettles and pans and smoothing many a pillow for young ones that was sleepy or maybe had the measles. It has scrubbed floors and raised seven babies. And I'm telling you it has the Grand Army beaten fifty-seven ways. It knows something of fighting, too, but in that way it has nothing on her tongue. So much for her.

The old boss had been taking a hand in politics that summer. The men at the factory didn't like it much when he began to hand over his money and his time to help lick Judson, who was running again for governor. Judson was supposed to be helping the railroad to own this State. At the same time he was mighty popular with workingmen, for he stood in well with the union leaders, and though there wasn't any union in the factory then, yet you know how the rank and file of the boys feel. Besides, we was full of orders and working overtime, and the boss would be away, down the State, half the time, and cross and overworked and ugly when he was here, things had gone so wrong with him. He was fighting Judson because he didn't believe in the railroad crowd behind him, and free passes given to anybody who had a little pull here and there, and the ownership of the State, and the like of that, any more than old Ed Knowles believes in it. There weren't anything in it for the Old Boss. An honest feller can sometimes work his head off for unselfish

reasons and never get a cheer. He can listen to them that howl against him, and find out that all that is bad is mighty well organized, but that goodness bunches its hits very seldom and grows slow. Besides, there's always a lot of cranks running on in front of a straight feller, saying and doing the wrong thing, and while he is attending to them the crooks is creeping up behind with the sand-bags. Perhaps we oughter have got together and cheered the old man every time he come into the upper-leather room, but we didn't. We just didn't.

It was one of those times he dropped in on us near election that the Old Boss first met my mother-in-law. Saturday afternoons, except in winter, the factory is always closed down whether the goods get out or not — and I remember the very day, for the Camdenville ball team had come to over lick our boys and had brought a professional pitcher on the quiet for the last game of the season, and were betting with anybody they could find and trying not to seem too sure for fear of spoiling the odds. Their pitcher got thirty-five dollars from them and sold out to Fred, our barber, for fifty. So we won. It's funny, ain't it, why fellers slap themselves on the leg and are tickled when they hear a thing like that.

But, as I say, it was Saturday afternoon, and one of those days that come very hot way along in the fall. There was some breeze coming down the valley, and

that was hot, too. You could see the cattle up in the pasture there all lying down under the biggest of them chestnut trees in the shade, and you could hear the crowd hollering down to the ball field and tell that we was at bat and was knocking out the base hits.

Annie weren't feeling well and was somewhere in the house and the children were away. But Mrs. Byrnes was sitting out on the step with me, red in the face, and squatting like a busted bag of oats and swinging a palm-leaf fan and singing one of them old, up-and-down-hill Irish tunes that anybody can make up as they go along. And she was the first to see the Old Boss coming. He had been taking a walk. It was his habit. And here he was coming down across the fields from Wilder's Woods, with baggy trousers, and hat pulled down over his eyes, and his smile.

And the old lady says to me, "Jim, me bye," she says, "here comes the man who gives you a position," she says, "as my daughter Annie calls it," she says, "though I'm a plain-speaking woman and call it a job," says she. "And I think he's coming here," she says, "which is a good thing, for I want to see him a bit closer," she says. "I understand he has snubbed our family," she says. "I'll show him something about family, whoever he is," she says. "And yet," says she, "he looks like one of them rich men who don't smoke cigarettes or say 'my good man' to a laborer, and hasn't never got a divorce," she says. "I think him

and me has something in common," she says, "and I don't know how to praise him higher, in spite of Annie's feeling against him," says she.

"Say no more," says I, seeing that it was true that he would stop to swop a word with us.

He had the troubled look he had taken to wearing, but a smile was shining through it, and he pulled off his hat to the old lady. "How are yer all? And this is Mrs. Byrnes?" he says. "It's a hot day, Mrs. Byrnes."

"Sure, sir," says she, dropping him a courtesy; "ye are right about it, I have no doubt. I got so hot fanning myself I had to stop," says she. "It was like a man in the old country that planted six potatoes and got six from the crop," she says.

"So the world goes," says the Old Boss, laughing. And he pumped a glass of water and drank it and wiped his mouth and looked up at me. I knew what he was thinking about those days.

"Well, sir," I says, "you was down to the Capital yesterday. How goes everything?"

The old man shook his head. "I don't like it, Jim," he says. "The fact is that Lounsbury, the lawyer, is back with the railroad crowd. He can swing the election."

"And he'll want something for doing it, maybe," I says.

"What makes you think it?" says the old man. "Lounsbury is said to be the ablest man in the State,

and one of the best constitutional lawyers in the country," he says. "He holds himself very respectable," says he, "and has money and all kinds of honors everywhere, and there ain't anything he says that ain't careful weighed and measured. Where did you get the idea he wanted anything? But you're right. He's fifty-seven years old, and he wants the vacancy left on the Supreme Court by Matthews's death."

"And Judson will appoint him?" I says. "Well," I says, "I think I would myself, maybe. He's got a fine head on him — a wonderful head."

I seen the old man catch his breath as if he was going to let me have one of them storms of his. But instead he let the breath go again, handed me a cigar, bit one himself, and looked up at the sky.

"Jim," he says after a while, "we Americans is getting like the Greeks," he says.

"Mercy on us, then!" says Mrs. Byrnes, "for it's all I can do to tell 'em from the Eyetalians," she says.

"It's the ancient Greeks, I mean," he says; "there was too much head and too little heart about 'em. They had the brains, but they was treacherous and deceitful. They was always selling out and going over to the other side if there was anything in it for them. They was good fighters and builders like we are," he says, "and maybe better than us someways, but," he says, "they was double-cross artists," he says. "If

it was only brains that was worth counting, maybe Lounsbury would be the best judge in the country."

"But you're afraid of his honesty on the bench?" I says.

"No," says the Old Boss, shaking his head. "'Tis a funny thing about that. He is a sample of a lot of our men. They serve them who employs 'em. Many a crooked business man will make a straight public officer, many a crooked lawyer will make an honest judge."

"Oh! ho!" says the old lady, with a laugh. "'Tis fussy ye are. Yer not only want a man to leave a public office clean, but you want to have him clean when he comes there."

"I do," says he, shutting his thick fist. "And why not? Would you have your grandchildren — Jim's Mike, for instance — think he could be crooked all his life, and finally get a public honor because he was smart and promised to reform?"

"Ye have me there," says she, making him a drop of her apron. "And I'll ask yer, sir, what is this Lounsbury's name?"

"Ogden G.," I says.

"The hell you say!" says she, forgetting herself, for her husband had been a hard-talking man.

"You know him!" we says. And I think both of us felt that it was something important.

The old lady screwed up her nose and stuck her

tongue into her cheek and bent her head one side as if she was thinking.

"Have ye had a talk with Governor Judson?" she says to the Old Boss.

"No," he says, looking at her, surprised.

"Say what you have in mind," I says to her. "Do you know this Lounsbury?"

"I do," says she, "seeing you're in such a hurry, and talk to me as if I was working for yer by the week. And furthermore, I wish I had a chance to talk with the governor."

At that we both laughed. And the Old Boss put his head back with a grin and says, "Do you think you could influence him?" he says.

"Where would yer begin, Mrs. Byrnes?" I says, respectful, and remembering the wash-board she broke over my head. "You talk as if Lounsbury was an old friend of yours."

"I knew him well," says she.

"Maybe," says I, "he proposed marriage to yer."

She gave me a black look, and says, "You're very funny for a son-in-law at your time of life," she says. "Smarter men than ye have had something bounced on 'em for less than your sauce. If we were alone, I have other things to say to yer that ye don't see often in books," she says. "And as for this thin-nosed, cold-handed Lounsbury, he never said a word to me in his life."

"I thought you said you knew him!" says the Old Boss, with his hand on the gate.

"I did," she says. "I was in his office many a time, when it was Emmet & Lounsbury on the door."

"What doing?" I says.

"Scrubbing the floor," says she.

With that the Old Boss gave a chuckle, and took off his hat and walked off over the gravel down Maple Street. The old lady stood on the step watching him go. There was a fly buzzing around her forehead, and I could tell by the way she slapped at it she was feeling the blood of them who dug in the peat-bogs.

"Jim," she says to me, "where is this man, Judson?"

"The governor, you mean," I says.

"The devil with yer titles," says she. "Do you know where he is?"

"I do," says I. "He comes up to spend Saturdays and Sundays at the lake," I says. "He has a cottage there."

"Go harness the horse," says she. "And don't stand there with your mouth open as if your brains were out of breath."

"What's all this?" I says.

She give me a sniff. "Well," she says, "if you must know, little boy, you'll go without your supper to-night. 'Tis ten miles to the lake, and I'm going to see the governor," she says, "to show yer what an old-fashioned

woman can do," she says. "Don't cross me," she says, "or ye'll wish you'd never married into my family," she says.

Well, of course I tried to hold back. The old woman had raised a lot of children, though. She'd taught 'em to fear sin, but they had learned that sin weren't even a poor second to the old lady herself when she set her jaw and got a kinder cold and hot look in her blue eye. The umpire's face when he says, "Didn't yer hear me say you was out?" ain't nothing to it. So she went upstairs to change her dress, and I harnessed up the horse, — that horse named Frank I bought from the Phenix Hotel. He'd been in pasture for a whole summer. I can remember now how I swore a couple of times, and maybe I took the old lady's name in vain, as they say. And maybe when old Frank seen me get down the harness he done the same. Them animals is more intelligent than you'd think.

It was no afternoon for a drive, anyhow. There'd been no rain for a week, and even the bushes beside the road was white with the dust. Many a butterfly would turn up his nose at 'em. And furthermore, I looked up the valley, and there was one of them black hunks of thunder-clouds rolling up between the hills. It was a poor day for a drive, and I was mad.

There was something about it that made me madder yet when I seen the old lady. She was dressed up like two Sundays, a funeral, and christening. Well can I

remember the bonnet with the black ribbons setting business-like on her white head and the starchy look of her black silk dress. And I looked at the seat of the buggy, and I looked at the width of her, and I wiped my forehead with my sleeve and wished there'd been no half holiday at the factory and that I was doing a hard day's work for honest wages.

I says to her, says I, "I believe when I told yer I'd go with yer I was crazy with the heat," I says. "Look at the thunder-cloud," I says. "A regular dog-day shower left over from the summer to scare off winter with," I says. "Look at it!"

"And keep an eye on me," she says, shooting a look at me and patting a pocket-book she carried in one hand. "Hello, Frank," she says to the horse, and I seen the sheepish look on his face as she said it. So with that she climbed into the buggy and bent the step on the way. "I've told Annie," she says. "But what's the matter here?" she says. "Move over! Do you want the whole of the seat?" she says.

Anything for peace, with me. "You seem cross," I says.

"I ain't cross, Jim," she says, as we went over the top of the hill. "But if I'm going to see the governor, 'tis necessary for me to be — what will ye call it — a very wilful woman," she says. "I'm not so crazy as ye think, Jim. Do you see this pocket-book? Well, me bye, I have a paper in there I've had these fifteen

years," says she. "And in this match that's going to come off it maybe will play a part."

"What is it?" I says, switching the flies off Frank.

"You'll know later," she says. "For if I see this man Judson I'll leave ye near at hand," says she, "to listen," she says, "and if ye hear me going too far with his Honor, or whatever you call him," she says, "you must say, 'It's time we was going,' " she says. "Don't forget them words. For ye know, Jim," she says, "that in the bottom of my heart I have little use for bold ladies," she says, "and I've made one break already this day," she says.

"And do you expect me to play a fool before the governor?" I says. "No," says I, "I'm fool enough to go this far with yer. And though I'm curious to know what you, who are a strange woman he never seen before, will say to him, and what you expect to do with him, I'll be the background of this picture," I says, "and maybe out of focus altogether," I says.

With that she give me a scornful look, and I could hear her mumbling to herself as if she was rehearsing something. And it weren't till we got to Hampton's Mill, where the trees hang overhead and make it cool, and yer smell that kinder moist smell of the woods. that she put her hand on my arm and says to me again, with a sort of scared look on her face, "Don't forget to help me," she says.

But I wasn't thinking of helping her. "What a fine

trip!" I says to myself. "A goose chase!" I says. And the first big splashing drops of rain, each one with a half a glass of water in it, slapped us as we come out into the open and seen the light from the sunset on the yellow fields, running away in front of them shadows of the clouds. We was up on a ridge, and could look down to the lake a good four miles away. I took out my watch, and it was half-past six already. I knew it would soon be dark, and the rain had begun to jump up and down on the buggy top as if it was being spilled out of a tub. It was so thick you could scarce see the road.

"Frank," I says, "old horse," I says, "turn your ears down," I says, "or they'll fill with water," I says, "and ye'll not be able to hear what I'd say if I could talk with freedom." With that I turned around and grinned at the old lady. She had her best clothes on. Both them and her bonnet was hanging this way and that, and the black ribbon on the hat was dripping fast dye on to the white lace around her neck. She looked like a bird that has been in the mucilage bottle, and to tell the truth, I was sorry for her. I believe she knew it, for I seen her jaw set, and her two fists was closed and resting on her knees, — very ugly.

CHAPTER XIX

AT the edge of the slope down to Jones's Landing, where the summer hotel was, where the boarders sit out on the piazza in the summer, it stopped raining. It was growing dark and cool again, and more like late fall, and the fog was hanging over the lake. You could see the stars, too, and the moon. And I remember there was one of them herons flapping across the lake and squawking as it flew.

"That's a female," says I, "if I'm any judge of noise and disposition," I says to the old lady.

"Ye ought to know," says she, sarcastic, "for ye have much in common wid the lower animals."

"Go on, Frank," says I to the horse, and we turned down on to the shore road, and I remember when the beast kicked a pebble over the edge of the bank you could hear 'em drop into the black, greasy-looking water. The moon had come up big and round, and I tell yer it was mighty still on the lake. It was some night! It was the kind that makes yer feel that things ain't wrong, after all.

I come near forgetting and driving past the governor's cottage. The old lady hadn't said a word. She hadn't even made a noise except to lick her lips now and then,

and I guess it made her jump when I pulled up old Frank in a dark place by a gate and says to her, "Here it is."

There was a hedge there, and somebody standing on the other side of it — some woman — maybe his wife. It was so still that when she got up, like a ghost showing over the top of the hedge, it woke up a couple of little birds asleep in the maple tree.

"Is the governor here?" I says, and I could feel Mrs. Byrnes sitting herself up straighter beside me, and I remember her black silk dress give out a very strange, wet noise as she moved.

"Oh, he hasn't gone far," says the woman. I didn't know who she was, but the air was that still you could smell the perfume on her. "He just walked down to the old boat landing there; and if it's important, just drive right out on to the landing itself," she says; "the floor is all solid," she says, "and I guess you can talk with him."

"Thank ye, ma'am," says my mother-in-law, "we will do so," she says, very polite, as Frank started up again.

It wasn't a hundred yards before we turned down on to the old landing and come out from the shadow of the trees. There was a big, tall, heavy-shouldered man walking up and down, and there was so much shine on the water that, being on the edge of the beams, he looked as if he was cut out of black paper. He was walking back and forward like a polar bear with a summer circus. You could almost see him duck his head when he turned

like the beast that don't quite bump against the wall of the cage. It was Judson.

I guess the old lady knew it, too. For when I stopped the horse, she got out of the buggy backwards, feeling around with her foot for the step and standing up straight when she was on the ground, smoothing down her wet dress. "Don't forget," says she, "to stop me if I go too fast with him," she says. "I'm not educated," she whispers to me very solemn, "and sometimes I have to make up for it with something strong," she says, "and ungentlemanly," she says. "Just say to me that it's time to be going, or words like them," she says.

The governor had stopped pacing up and down by that time, for he seen she was coming to speak with him. He had no hat on, even though it was very sharp, and you could see the shine where there was a little bald spot on the top of his head, but he made a bow with his hand and says, "Did you want to see me?"

"I do that, your Honor," says she, "and furthermore, I'll tell yer who I am," she says. "My name is Mary Byrnes, and spare worry," she says, "for I care nothing about votes for women," she says.

With that he gave a kinder rumbling chuckle as if he was well pleased, and he bowed again and says, "Well?"

"Have no fear," she says, "I have a better hand for stating what I want than for always getting it. But be that as it may, as my husband uster say," she says, "I've come to ask yer about this judge business,—what

is it they call it? — this Supreme Court business, and I want to tell yer that yer mustn't appoint Lounsbury. And there, now," she says, "the cat is out of the bag and climbing up her lef," she says.

"Perhaps we oughter to be going now," says I, getting frightened, when I seen the governor turn quick toward her, as if she'd taken his breath from him. But neither of 'em heard me.

"It's funny you come just now," he says, slow enough, "just when matters of that kind was on my mind," he says, and looked off across the water and ran his hand down the edge of his coat. Then he laughed again. "Well," he says, "what reason have yer for asking me to leave Mr. Lounsbury out of it?" he says, as if he was talking to a child.

"That's easy told, too," says she. "Once I was scrub woman," she says, "in the building where he had his office, and," she says, "sometimes after hours when I'd be on my knees on the floor earning my pay, I'd hear him and his partner Emmet talking together," she says. "Yer can get to know men surprising with no acquaintance whatever," she says, "being a scrub woman," she says, "or a scrub lady, as them who have hotel jobs call it," she says. "It was the winter when my husband crushed his hand," she says, "and the family was on me," she says.

The governor shifted his feet as if he wanted to hurry her.

And with that she says to him, "Don't be uneasy," she says. "'Tis quick said. There weren't anything alike between Mr. Emmet, with his big round head, and this Lounsbury feller," she says, "though both of them was smart. For," she says, "I heard them one night talking together after the clerks had gone, and I was pushing the soapy water over the boards. They paid no attention to me at all. It was the day they split," she says. "They were hot and angry wid each other and paying no attention to me. And Mr. Emmet told Lounsbury, just as clear as I'm talking to you now," she says, "that he wouldn't have nothing to do with a deal that was going through. And Mr. Lounsbury says to Mr. Emmet that he was a fool, and that there was no need to be more fussy about doing a law business than other lawyers. It was something about the selling of one company to another," she says. "And," she says, "Mr Emmet weren't a fool. He said he knew that he was throwing away a big thing to refuse it, but that, as for him, he was a lawyer that wouldn't sit up nights trying to beat the law by smart tricks. He said he'd rather look up titles first, whatever he meant by that," she says. "It seems to me as if I could remember everything he said, he was that mad and stiff and sneering. And Lounsbury was sneering, too. And he said to Emmet, 'I'll take this letter I've written 'em on the firm paper and tear it up!' And he crumpled it up in his hand in a rage and threw it into the waste-basket, like

an actor does. And he said that he wouldn't ever sign his name for the firm of Emmet & Lounsbury again. He was through!" she says. And she stopped, out of breath.

"Well?" said the governor, kinder short of his words.

"Well," says she, "it showed me the kind of man he was — this Lounsbury. And I've heard since that he was that kind of man, sir," says she.

With that Judson waved his arm at her the way you brush a fly off your other hand. "My good lady," says he, like that, "how can I listen to these rumors?"

"Ho, ho!" says she, making a move at him, "rumors, is it? There was men who took his advice then who came near going to jail for the taking of his advice. And I know what it was, because that night when he left it was me — Mrs. Byrnes — that took the letter, all crumpled up and in anger forgotten, out of the waste-basket. Rumor, is it? Well, I had the letter," she says, "and I've got it yet!"

The governor turned on her as if he would have pushed her off into the water. He seen she had a piece of paper in her hand, and he started to speak once or twice, and then he says, "Let me read it."

And I remember how he turned his back to the moon and held the paper near his eyes. I was half stiff with watching him, and all I could hear was the horse breathing in front of me. It was when he was through with it and handed it back that he give a ugly laugh, and he

says, "Who sent you to me," he says, "with this piece of blackmail?" he says, "this letter that helps to tie up Lounsbury with that old quarry and mining case?" he says. "So they're trying to force me, are they?"

"Nobody sent me," says the old lady, mad as a hen in a blizzard, "and I give ye the friendly advice to talk civil to me, whoever and whatever ye be," she says. "I'm a taxpayer and employ ye," she says, "and I want some etiquette from ye," she says.

"We oughter be going," says I, calling to her.

She never heard me that time, either. She just went on in a hurry. "Blackmail," she says, "is a different matter," she says. "Do you think a poor woman, like I was then, with three young ones sleeping in one bed for the want of blankets, didn't think of selling that letter back to Lounsbury? I ask yer," she says.

"Why not?" says the governor, sudden and sharp.

"Why not yourself?" she says, shaking the paper at him. "Because I was what Lounsbury might call a fool — one of them honest fools. Bad enough to take a drop of whiskey now and then and not bad enough to be rich. You've had an introduction to me now, Mr. Governor," she says, "and I'll make ye even better acquainted with me!" And before his very eyes she tore the paper up and threw the little bits into the lake. I remember how white they looked, fluttering down. "Now," she says, "do you know better what sent me?" And I seen her jaw go out.

At that Judson drew a big breath, and kinder leaned forward to look at her.

“What interest can yer have in this?” he said, slow and cold.

She went nearer to him, and then she says: “Do yer see this dress wet with the storm,” she says, “that cost me twenty-six dollars and ninety-five cents? Do you see I’m stout and suffer with the heat and have driven eight miles here with my son-in-law, who’s in a bad temper?” she says. “Do yer see me a woman that ain’t in politics? Well, then, what the devil!” says she. “To say nothing of my hat!” she says.

“No, Mr. Governor,” she says, going on, “I raised seven children,” she says, “and have eighteen grandchildren now,” she says, “some of them screaming for milk and others wearing holes in stockings,” she says, “and as for me, I hope the best for all of them. I don’t want none of them, be they boys,” she says, “to think they can be one of these Lounsbury fellers, smooth and slick and successful and wid plenty of money and brains and the like of that, and then think they can go to some governor and get appointed a judge,” she says.

It was then Judson turned around so the moon hit upon his face, with its lines and shadows. I remember it well. And he kinder hunched up his shoulders as if his coat didn’t fit him, and once he wiped his mouth with his hand.

“Have you ever thought,” he says, “that some men

with the kind of ability we want in office," he says, "haven't just the record we'd like 'em to have, because they are always fighting for one side or the other? They've served them who has employed 'em with all their strength, and they will serve us, if we employ 'em, with all their strength, too. I've been thinking about that," he says.

The old lady put both her hands up before her and waved them at him. "Ho, ho!" says she, with a whistle, "'tis second-hand goods, then, we want — the kind that was sold to some one else first?" she says. "Let them with mud on their feet come in to sweep out the parlor. Is that it, eh?" she says. "Call for the man who has been putting ground glass in your food to be the doctor. Let the slick feller play the devil, and then take off your hat to him and say; 'Come to dinner with me. I'm going to pin a medal on ye and show my oldest boy how to be a Success,'" she says, — "with a big S on the beginning and end," she says. "Is it that, governor? Answer me, and I'll go back to the grandchildren and tell 'em just what they're up against."

"Wait," says he. "I'm just as interested in those youngsters of yours as you are," he says. "But Lounsbury sees things differently now than he uster."

"After he's made his money," she says.

The governor laughed a bit. "Suppose he feels sorry?" he said.

"Let him," says she. "If he'd been a poor man who

stole a watch for a starving family or to buy a half a pint of whiskey or the like of that, he'd been breaking rock long ago. 'Tis well he feels something!"

"Well," says he, and I remember his very words as he spoke 'em; he was walking toward her, over the boards.

"Well," he says, "then you'll not forgive him?"

"Hivin' bless ye!" says she. "Just say you'll not make him judge; and I'll join wid ye in a forgiveness that'll make his head swim," she says.

With that he laughed again — very short it was, and he looked again over the lake. And he looked for a long time, big and still. And after a bit he turned around again.

"Mrs. Byrnes," he says, "you have been a good mother and grandmother I have no doubt at all," he says. "And when you go back you needn't say who told yer, but you can tell them grandchildren of yours that if they want to be appointed judges by me that they have got to show up better than Lounsbury has," he says. "It will cost me something to tell you that," he says, "but there it is. You have my word," he says. "And I'm not so sure, Mrs. Byrnes," he says, with the serious look going from him, "that you can't say to them that if Judson was king instead of a common or garden governor, their grandmother wouldn't have to ask twice to be prime minister," he says.

And he took her hand.

"Ye have a sterling silver tongue on ye," says the old

lady. "Whisper!" and she pulled him down and said something close to his ear and "Good-by," she says.

I thought she would talk to me when we started back along the road, but she didn't. I looked over my shoulder, and seen the governor as we found him in the moonlight, throwing a long shadow as he walked. She looked back, too, but she didn't say nothing. We had eight miles before us.

Why, it weren't till we got into that stretch of woods below the last hill that she said a word.

"Jim," she says, "I guess my clothes are wet, and I'm awful cold, Jim," she says.

"We'll be home soon," says I.

It was at the top of the hill I first seen her face, and I seen her eyes were wet.

"What's the matter?" says I, easy.

And with that she stuck her old head down on to my shoulder and shook and shook. "Jim," she says, crying soft, "put your arm about me, bye. I'm only a woman, after all."

Somehow the Old Boss heard of that night. The governor must have let it out, I suppose, for after the Boss went that Sunday to beg him not to appoint Lounsbury, he knew how the old lady had been there before him. It wasn't till Tuesday after we had been looking over a new eyeleting machine in the office with the foreman of the stitching-room that he mentioned it to me.

"Jim," he says, when he had told me, "I'm coming by

your house to-night. I want to tell Mrs. Byrnes what a fine piece of work she has done;" and he laughed as if he not only was pleased, but thought it a good joke, into the bargain.

"Well," I says, "you'll not see her. She went down on the train yesterday," I says.

"You don't say so?" he says, and stopped and thought a minute. "Is your family all well?" he says.

"Why, yes," says I, "except for a welt over little John's eye," I says.

"Is your daughter well?" he says.

"Why, yes," says I, wondering.

"She's at home?" says he.

I was frightened then. "She was when I left this morning," says I. "Why do you ask?" I says.

"Nothing," says he. "Only you know the employees' savings account for the benefit of the men and their families. Of course," he says, "I look over the deposits, and balance now and then. You knew your daughter Katherine had a pretty good balance, didn't you?" he says.

"She has saved up money from doing embroideries and the like of that now and then," I says.

"Well, I didn't know but what —" he says and stopped. Then he looked up at me. "The truth of the matter, Jim," he says, "is this — yesterday she drew out the whole deposit," he says.

I looked at him, and he turned around in his desk chair and began to clear away the paper.

"I guess we don't need to discuss it any more," says he. "It's nearly noon," says he, "and I suppose you're ready to go home to dinner," he says.

I knew what he meant, all right, and it's true I almost ran the whole way, and it was one of them hot days again, too. And I went into the kitchen, and I looked around, and my Annie says: "What's the matter, Jim? What ails you? What are you looking for?"

"Where's Katherine?" says I.

"Upstairs," she says, "altering her gray dress," says she. "I thought you'd seen a ghost, and a very homely ghost at that," she says, "by the way you look."

I didn't answer her; I sat down in the kitchen chair by the window, and my legs felt as if they were made of macaroni. "Tell her I want to speak with her," I says after a minute, "and I want you to hear, too," I says. "Don't stop. Let's have it over," I says. She must have seen I meant business, for she wiped her hands on her apron and never stopped to close the oven door.

I can remember now how Katherine looked. I think she knew the time had come for a reckoning with us. There was a shine in her eyes, and her nose moved when she breathed like the nose of a fine horse when the jockey is being weighed in.

"You drew out the money you've been saving?" I says.

"Yes," she says.

"What for?" I says.

"For him," says she — "for Bob."

"You're going to send the money to him — that wretch!" says my Annie.

"No, mother," says she, "not send it. I don't know where he is — exactly. I'm going to find him."

"Oh, Katherine!" says her mother, with a voice that made the girl look around and press her hands on the lungs as if her wind had been cut off.

"You mean that you would disgrace us all?" I says.

"It is no disgrace," she says. "I will tell you," she says. "He came to me before he went. He didn't ask me to go with him. He didn't ask me anything. He just waited for me to say something — maybe to say good-by. But I sent him away," she says. "I turned my back on him. I told him he was different than I thought. I told him I wrote to him the first time not to see me any more for his sake, but that the second time I was through with all of it for my own. I told him I didn't care for him any more, and" says she, "now I know it was a lie. And I know it was for me to stick to him, no matter what it cost. He can have me and my help, and I'm going to find him make him go back to his college and come back to this town, no matter what he has done or who knows it."

And with that she brushed some of her hair back from her face. I remember how I thought her forehead was a

good deal like Annie's, for it is at them times you see little things. And then I guess I gave a sneer.

It's funny how a sneer will make all the difference in the world. Families is wrecked by 'em, and they stick in the mind when a lot of profanity and even a smash on the nose is long ago forgotten.

She seen it, and the blood come into her face as if somebody had slapped it, and she bit her lips and shut her hands. But when she spoke, you would have thought she was as calm as milk set for cream.

"It's no disgrace!" she says. "The neighbors' talk don't make it so. It's no disgrace if I love him. And even if I gave him all a woman has and charged nothing up against it, it would be no disgrace," she says. "God didn't make me what I am, to make me reckon with him for being what I am," she says. "And if there's no disgrace, as you call it," she says, "it will not be because I'm afraid of it," she says.

I heard her and I stood up. I put my bare fists on the table. "That's enough," I says, with my head swimming. "Go up to your room," I says, roaring at her. "I'll see you dead before you leave this house," I says.

She turned to her mother then, and my Annie shook her head and looked away. I seen the tears come into the girl's eyes. For that moment had brought the first of many things, I guess. And then she went out.

It was the next day that I will remember a long time.

Annie had been down on Main Street on one errand and another for three or four hours, and went home to be there when little John and Michael came from school, and I was on the door-step a bit early from the factory, waiting for her.

"A nice wife you are," I says, "to leave your husband like a dead geranium in a broken pot — locked out," I says.

"Locked out!" she says; "that's strange," says she. "I suppose Katherine has gone to Nellie Conroy's. Here's the key under the mat," she says, "though it takes almost an average intelligence to find it and walk in," she says.

"Don't be cross," I says.

"I'm not," she says, opening the door. "I'm just tired," she says. "I worried all yesterday afternoon and was awake most of the night about Katherine," she says. "It will never do to go rushing at her waving your arms any more than it pays to try to catch a horse in the pasture that way," she says.

"I suppose you think I should have gone up to her shaking oats around in a quart measure?" I says.

"No," says she. "But I have made up my mind to have a talk with her this afternoon. Don't worry, Jim," she says. "I will do what only a mother can do for her," she says.

And then, just as if her words had flown on to paper, I looked up and seen a little card pinned to the hand-

rail of the stairs. It was in my girl's handwriting. "Don't worry," it says, like something mocking us.

Annie saw it, too. "Go and look!" she says, and I ran up the stairs and went from room to room, and in the hall on the sewing-machine was a time-table open and lying there with the blue paper and the little figures staring up at me. Somehow it told me as if it was screaming in a hoarse voice.

CHAPTER XX

I HARDLY had grit enough in me to go down and face Annie. I could see when I met her at the bottom of the stairs that she knew. She was holding on to the post.

"She must have gone on the nine-thirty," says she. "Can there be any mistake?" she says, wringing her hands.

But I pointed to the card. "I wish she was dead!" I says. "It would be better," I says.

"Hush!" says she. "How can you judge of it?" she says. "Oh, Jim," says she, "will we ever see her back? Can't it ever be the same?"

I must have shook my head. I was thinking a hundred things—how to follow her, when I knew we didn't have any way to do it, and whether to tell the Boss, when I knew we must never let anybody know. It came to me then that we had nothing to do but wait—wait and lie to everybody. And in all the talks we had—my Annie and me—that was all that was ever decided. It was as bad as them dreams that make people scream and throw off the bedclothes at night. Sometimes Annie would put down her work in the evening and go out of the room into the kitchen, and I'd find her looking out across the field back of the barn and wiping her eyes. And I would sit sometimes and go back to the beginning,

and remember the girl from the time I first seen her, when she was no bigger than a summer squash, but pink and new, and trying within three hours of the time she came to kick her poor mother out of bed, and so on, until I could see that card and them words, "Don't worry," or maybe I could hear her voice talking those things that seemed to me so crazy and desperate and wild.

I suppose troubles never play a solo except to tune up. Most always one thing after another comes in until there's a full brass band of it. And that October it was giving me plenty of concerts.

Somehow a good many years had rocked along before the boys in the factory thought they had to have a labor-union. It was one of them necessities that everybody had overlooked, and as a matter of fact, now that I look back on it, I remember it wasn't anyone of us in the factory that discovered it. An organizer sent up by the Central Union down at the Capital was the feller. I have nothing to say against the union, for I've worked in places where it was the only thing that gave me a chance to sleep under blankets in the winter-time.

It was just the week or two before the girl left that this organizer came. It wasn't two days before he had all of the boys on edge to get together and elect officers, and inside of two weeks he had showed them all their grievances, and they were wearing celluloid buttons on their vests and had hired Masonic Hall for Friday evenings, so's they could have hot shot from hot authors,

and plain talk from plain people. And they had it, too ! What they didn't know about collective bargaining and closed shops and the piece system was the kind of knowledge that hadn't been found out !

That was the funny part of it. I joined the game, and so did every worker in the factory — to a man.

Dave Kennedy was president. I guess you never saw Dave. He was one of those fellers with a yeller mustache and a big blue eye that likes to see his name in print, and had talked so much in forty-five years that he was a regular artist. He used to make more speeches in one year in this little town than the President of the country made all over the United States. If the Hawk Falls base-ball team licked our local team, after we had hired a college pitcher and thought we had a sure thing, Dave would climb up on a barrel and explain it in words of eight syllables ; and when the town company came back from fighting the Spaniards at Camp Alger, although the "Committee on Welcome" purposely didn't invite Dave to the turkey supper in the town-hall, you bet your life Dave fooled 'em and stood on a barrel in front of the station and sailed in, mouth and fist, to tell the soldier lads what heroes they were, while the "Committee on Welcome" were up to the hall watching the ice-cream melt. Dave was a smart, bright feller, with a desire to shine, and he took the union very serious and gave it his best efforts, as they say in an obituary.

All of us took the union serious, and some of the men were pretty hot about things. The Boss was prosperous, and had a spanking, bright red, new automobile, and was building a new house, and a good many of us could tell a good deal better than he that we were having a hard time to buy phonographs. The boys knew what it was to have wages trusted for a grocer's bill that six hungers had run up, and have to tell a wife that Sadie couldn't have a new dress to go to school in, and have to see her sitting up with a kerosene lamp to turn Harry's old overcoat into little Eddie's new pants. Then there was a good deal of discussion about how the Boss made his money, because he wasn't paying the wages they paid in the cities down the State; and I guess that we forgot that living expenses were cheaper in this town, and that we had steady jobs all the year round, but that down the State they were liable to be laid off for six or eight weeks at a clip. Then there got to be the feeling that the Boss was an old bear who was out for his own pocket and didn't care how any of us got along, anyhow. He had a sort of sand-bag voice when he said no, and we'd heard it when we asked for higher pay for overtime; and when we asked for a closed shop, we heard it with trimmings on it. I often thought since that what really was troubling me and making me hot and full of prejudice was something different — the trouble he and his had brought to me and mine. He and I had grown apart, I guess. In those days we didn't trust each other much,

and I was on the committee that asked him for a closed shop.

I was spokesman for the committee that asked the Boss for a closed shop, and I started in and told the Boss fourteen reasons that was suggested to us by the central union why an employer shouldn't hire non-union help. The old man listened to me through, and then moved his desk chair back with a mean, squeaking sound. "No!" says he. "There are three reasons why I won't — because there isn't any use of your labor-union in this factory, anyway; because if I recognized your union, I might do something unfair to a good man who don't belong to it, and the third reason is just no!"

"Well," says I, thinking it was up to me to show what the union amounted to, "we have two hundred men in this factory behind us. Now, do I understand that you refuse?"

"Stuff!" says he, and that was all the good I got out of him.

That night we had a meeting of the union, and a delegate named Cole came up from the Capital to advise us. He and Dave and Terence Burns made speeches, and they all said the crisis had come, and banged on the table so's the water-pitcher danced. We fought a good deal about what we had better make the issue, and the hall got so hot three times that they had to open the windows, but finally those who pointed out that the wage

scale was lower than in any other town in the State won out, and we voted fifty-seven to twenty-eight to get higher pay or strike. Then Dave said: "Gentlemen, we are now setting out together on a stormy sea on the cause of labor and humanity. We cannot fail, for we have embarked on a righteous cause, but we must stick to each other to the end"; or something like that, and it made us feel kinder full and gulping, as if it was so serious we would never see our families or friends again.

The demand was made on the old man the next morning by the delegate who said he would act for us. Some of us stood in the packing-room just outside the office door, we were so anxious to see how the trouble would come out. The first thing I heard was the Boss.

"Who are you, anyhow?" says he. "If my men have a grievance, why don't they talk it out? They know me and I know them. We are acquainted—we are! But who are you? Why should I talk to you? Why should *you* ask to have me pay higher wages?"

"I'll tell you who I am," says the delegate, speaking up snappy. "I'm Peter J. Cole, from the central union. I guess you've heard of me, all right, all right, and the reason I am asking you to raise the wages according to this scale we've prepared is because I'm paid with a salary of two thousand dollars per year by the different local unions to do just this thing!"

"I wouldn't employ you at two thousand cents. You're bleeding the union with that salary of yours

about seven hundred times more than you're worth to 'em."

We could hear every word, and we knew well enough that Peter J. Cole wouldn't stand for that. And he didn't. He just come back at the Boss with a regular pirate's prayer, and then the chairs began turning over, and we were trying to remember just how much bigger Cole was than the Boss, when we heard the front door open and something bumping down the steps. What bumped was Cole.

Fifteen minutes later there came word through the factory that the Boss wanted to see every man and woman in the outer office. There's quite a lot of room in there, but a good many of us had to stand outside the doors; Cole had gone up over the hill, looking mad all the way up and down the back of his coat, and we weren't in the mood for any love-feast, either. None of us looked at each other, but we were sort of quiet, except for the squeaks of boots where those who were way back stood up on tiptoe to get a look at the Boss leaning up against a desk in the farthest corner. The old man didn't say anything for several minutes, but shifted his eyes from one to another of us until I guess he'd looked each one straight in the face.

"I haven't got much to speak about," says he at last. "It's just this — that if any person or persons, whether it's one or all of you, have any complaint to make about your employment here, you can come to me, and we'll

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talk it over. But when a labor-union, or any of its officers, come to me, I'm going to be too busy to talk or consider, because there isn't any need of a labor-union in this factory, and when a labor-union gets a man who never worked for me and never saw me before to do the talking, I'm going to kick him down the steps. That's all."

Some of the women up front were looking kinder scared, and leaned up against those back of 'em, but Dave Kennedy took a step forward, and I guess all of us moved forward with him — just one step. "The labor-union wants to know," says Dave, with his voice kinder jiggled, "whether you will grant the proposed higher scale of wages, such as are in force in the southern part of the State."

The Boss smiled a little, and Dave stood up very stiff and straight, with his fingers trembling along the seams of his overalls. As I said, the Boss smiled and he says: "I'm not going to answer you as president of the union; but as plain Dave Kennedy I'll tell you that I'm not going to raise your wages, Dave, because you're not earning any more than you're getting. My job is to make this business a success by keeping loaded down with orders and shaving off a small profit by running this factory where living is cheap, so labor will be cheaper, and by paying wages and shipping goods fifty-two weeks a year. If I sweetened the pay-roll, there wouldn't be any excuse for running at all. That's all there is to it."

Dave wheeled around, turning his back on the Boss and facing us, and he threw one hand up in the air like an actor, and says in a firm voice, "Strike!" And somebody else says, "Strike!" under his breath — like that, until most of us had said, "Strike!" backing away out of the room, leaving the Boss all alone, standing in front of the desk, looking at the floor.

It was most noon, and the day before had been payday, so we quit right there — all of us except eighteen Poles who couldn't speak English, and didn't know what was doing, and four Canucks who were getting higher pay than they ever had hoped for. Everybody was excited, and wanted to use the soap in the wash-rooms first, and talked about how it would be a fight to the bitter end, and went down the stairs jawing and forgetting to fill up their pipes, the way they generally did at noon hour. When you'd see the men crowding out the doors of the rooms, pulling on their coats, and behind them the empty spaces with long rows of machines all dead and quiet except for the shafting, which was still running, it seemed sort of like a scene in a play that makes you lean forward and keeps you there, even though your collar cuts into your neck. And I can remember how my Annie met me at the door, wiping her hands on her apron, and asked whether it was true the men had gone out, and I said, "Yes," and how she looked at me and says, "Ain't it dreadful, Jim? These are evil times for us, dear!"

The next few days it was kinder pleasant to be striking, because, for one thing, it was the most exciting business that had ever happened in town, and being a striker made the fellers feel sort of important and anxious to see what the big dailies down the State were saying about 'em. And then, again, if it was a cold morning with one of those slashing winds blowing down the valley, you didn't have to jump out of bed at half-past six, but could lie there and think of your breakfast, and how you could sit in the sunlight at the south window in the kitchen, and fool with the kids, and how, later, you could walk down into the town, and watch the boys play pool in the back of the barber shop and talk about how we'd make the Boss come to terms.

The Boss used to go down to the factory every day, and he had the Canucks and Poles pack up the finished goods—there weren't more than twelve cases—and cart 'em to the station, while everybody who saw 'em would hoot and yell at 'em, and the boys would throw handfuls of mud at the team and make it splash up against the white sides of the boxes. They hooted at the Boss, too, but he would just look kinder solemn, and go on down to the office, and you could see him dictating letters to the stenographer, and it kinder made a feller feel sorry for him to see how the windows were getting all dusty, and there was no water running through the penstock, and everything was going to thunder. And then I'd think of how he had taken my girl away, and I'd feel

a good deal hotter, and grin when some other union man would let out a few curses, and say he'd like to chuck a rock through the front door.

Everybody expected the Boss would cave in pretty quick when we put him right up against it, but after five days he hadn't showed any signs of it, and it kept a feller uneasy, because there weren't going to be a pay envelope, and although the tradespeople in town were giving us what support they could, of course they couldn't run their business on nothing. After a week there was a good deal more coffee than steak on the table. Some of the boys were driven pretty hard. About twenty men slid out of town during the next ten days to look for jobs somewhere else, but every one of those were young fellers who weren't married, and didn't have a house here with a vegetable patch in the back yard, and furniture bought on the instalment plan and almost paid for.

Being a striker weren't any fun the second week, when you had to toss up a nickel to see whether you'd spend it on a plug of tobacco for yourself or a pound of sugar for the house. It made the men feel hot and bad-hearted to think the Boss was trying to drive us to the wall and kinder starve us back to work — it made me fill up clean full of feelings that would make me speak cross to the kids and slam the front door hard when I came in or went out, and got me to feeling sour until I knew I'd make the Boss sweat and go to the ropes before I'd ever give in. Some of the men got drunk, and maybe

you'd see a feller whooping it along Main Street at noon, cursing at everybody and people cursing at him, and it seemed as if everybody who got to hating the Boss got to hating each other, too.

Somehow it seemed that I was picked to learn the whole story about discontent in those days after Katherine had gone, and when every hour we didn't hear from her seemed longer than the last, and the strike had made me idle, with nothing to do but get sullen, like a machine that ain't used and rusts and goes out of gear.

But I suppose it was because we've got that unfinished attic over the kitchen that I learned the last lesson I need about envy and hate and ill-will. Annie thought we ought to rent it, being the strike was going on, and we had to begin to use the money she had laid away in the bank.

"A nice time you'll have renting it," I says, "and a very exciting time collecting any rent in these days," I says.

"There are some new men at the mirror factory," she says.

"They are Poles and the like of them," I says.

"Oh, well," she says, "they are human beings," she says, "with the same stomach-aches and vanity as the rest of us," she says. "I intend to ask. A dollar is rounder now than a few weeks ago," she says. "I may have luck in getting some man who is agreeable," she says. I have to laugh now when I think of her words, for she drew a strange prize.

CHAPTER XXI

WE called him Pete Sotus. He was a Russian, I used to think, and that weren't his name. But the nearest I ever come to it is just Pete Sotus.

He was the kind you remember — a young feller, too, six feet four, and shoulders like a beef and muscles like an ox. There's some kinds of people built like carriage horses and some like racing ponies, fine and limber, — and some are built to pull, like Pete Sotus — a dray-horse of a man. They'd bred him to it. It was in his blood. There was veins red and swollen in his bulgy forehead that showed the work he'd done. They showed the work his great-grandfather had done, too. His shoulders were stooped and his hair was bleached out by the sun and his eyes were stupid! 'Twas the hardest kind of work for that feller to think, and he was always at it; and when he thought it weren't cool, like a machine that's oiled, but it was hot, and every time he'd get to thinking, the muscles would stand out all over his jaw, as if it hurt him!

He had come from somewhere down the State to get a job in our town. He needed the work all right — from his looks. I saw him first at the station. He didn't have a collar. His neck looked so big it

seemed as if no collar would fit it. I found out later he had lived on hot coffee longer than a body of his size ought to stick to that kind of nourishment.

He got a job at the mirror factory and then he came looking for rooms. Annie took him in — that's her way.

"He'll rock the floors till the ceiling is down," says I. "Listen!" I says. "There is a pile driver upstairs," I says, hearing him walking above us.

"Oh, well," says Annie, philosophizing the way she does. "It's better than having some skinny little sawed-off man that slips his feet along the floor like a cat," she says. "I must say I have a great distrust of noiseless men," she says. "Go and say a cheerful word to him," she says. So I went out to the front room and nodded to him to come in.

"You're taking life hard, Swanson," says I, thinking he was a Swede, and meaning to jolly him a bit.

"I haf more work to do dan dis," says he, tying knots in his words and talking like them foreigners go on. And he put one of his hands — as big as the two of mine, and every finger the size of a child's arm — on my shoulder and says, "There ain't no rest for us till ve is all free," he says.

"Free of what?" I says.

"Listen," says he, "you belief in der brodderhood of mans, eh? By Gott, der day of light is come — the time ven ve should haf equalities. You is a stranger

to me, but der is der brodderhood of work between us. I see it in dese hands of yours; look at mine, eh? Dey is hard, eh? Vat is it what makes us to vork — always to vork? It is der slaferly of der existing order of dings?" he says, and, anyhow, it was something like that; I've heard them fellers go on so much I know it backwards.

So I says, "When did you hear of this railroad wreck?" and laughed.

"Brodder," he says, "belief me, I would gif my life to make some men vid riches gif back to some different men — vat is slaves dat makes vork and labor vid der blind hands — to gif to dese vat Gott haf given to us in der first place," he says, and his eyes went a-swimming like they was running tears, and his forehead was in bunches where it hurt him to think. But the feller meant what he said!

And he says, "Vat difference makes it about me? I am nobody — I haf left my vife and house vat is in der country down der State ver der rent I pay is eat all der vork I do vid my hands. Vat of it? I ask. No, I haf gif my life to der making of equvality. And if ve don't haf it van vay," he says, shutting his paws into a fist, "ve must make it to come," he says.

Then he points out the window, and there was the Boss going by in his shiny automobile. "Look," he says, "see dis man vat is. He makes a ride in vat makes to him a big cost; dis cost is more dan vould buy me a place to live vid for all der life," he says, and he got red in the

face, and I thought his yellow hair would get red, too. And he says, "I hate dis man. Der light is broke on der vorld, and I haf lef' my vife and everytink. Yah, I would gif my life for der equvality. Till dis spring vas I a fool. I did not know," he says, and handed me a worn-out old printed newspaper. I remember it well. 'Twas called the *Light of Man*. And he says, "Please to look. Dis is it — wroted by der Mister Blacksong. Read, please."

"Who is this Blacksong?" I says.

And then he explained to me that Blacksong was an anarchist or socialist or the like of that, whatever it was, who held meetings down at the Capital in the room of some Pole who was the janitor of one of them red burlap tenements.

And Pete Sotus came to room with us. Annie bought a second-hand cot from Mrs. Riordan, who was out of business because of the strike, and put in a day's work cleaning it with gasolene and other poison, and Pete was such a big bruiser that she had to put a chair at the bottom of it to hold his feet. It wasn't bad to have him. He'd work all day, and at night he'd be out walking and thinking and bending his face. He was quiet enough, but it was like a funeral to see him sitting around with that scowl. You could see without asking he was hating the rich and all that kind of business.

Yes, sometimes he'd walk up and down in the kitchen with his stupid eyes a-shining and his big hands out like

he was seeing a picture full of angels and them things. And then again maybe he'd throw his hulk of a body into one of the wooden chairs and look down into the empty coal-hod, and grind his teeth together and rub his red forehead with his fingers. I've known lots of laborers in my time, but I never knew a feller to have a doctrine worse.

He'd talk, too. "Mr. Jim," he'd say, "vonce vas I an animal. Vas it fault from me? No! Look at dese arms," he'd say, and pull his shirt back so's you could see his wrists, as round and hard as a die mallet, and covered with yeller hair, like a peroxide gorilla. "Yah," he'd say, "my fadder vas like it, and his fadder vas like it. Animals! Vy? Gott in hefen know it vas by reason dat all of us lifed under der slafery. Ve should be men, not animals. Der rights should come vid us, and ve should haf der equvality and men be. So vill it come now."

And the poor devil thought so. He felt so bad about it he'd sit there and look into the coal-hod and then perhaps jump up and be off, knocking over the mops and things that used to stand in the hall.

My Annie didn't laugh at him, like me. "Poor feller," she'd say. "He don't get a happy moment, and he'd lay down and die for his foolishness, and that's something you oughter not forget, Jim."

And I remember one night when Pete come home

with a sheet of paper and poetry written on it. He was that excited he hadn't had no supper, and sick-looking, big as he was — and crazy to read us this rhyme business that Blacksong had sent him. Annie was washing up the dishes over the sink, and there was a rattle of 'em and so on. But she stopped and says, "Let him alone, Jim; let him read it to you."

"Please listen by dis," he says. And he puts his thick finger on the words and begun to spell 'em out. "Der Man vid a Hoe," he says. I remember it well, he read it so slow. It seems like this — the poetry told about a feller who'd been bred up to work like a son of a gun — a feller who was a farm-hand. And he was something like this Pete Sotus — didn't know nothing, except how to dig and the like of that, and was kinder like an animal, just as Pete had said, and didn't have no chance nor nothing — like a truck-horse. It kinder made you think, with this foreign feller reading it aloud so slow, and running his finger along kinder trembling on the paper, like he was reading a letter that said somebody was dead.

And when it was finished, Annie she looked at me and plucked at her apron, and Pete Sotus threw his big body over on the table and puts his head down in his arms and says, "I vas it. I vas a man vid a hoe." And you'd think the honest work he'd done would like to break his heart. It made me think some then. I thought about it right heavy till I went to bed, and then

I remember, as I was hanging my coat over a chair, I says to my Annie, "Are you awake?"

"Yes," she says.

"I've been thinking about that work business, and it seems as if there weren't a fair show for everybody."

"Of course there ain't," she says, "but, Jim, it can't be had in a minute. Them poems is all right, but 'tis a shame to let anybody read 'em who will be worse off for it and not better. Pete was happy till somebody began telling him he weren't. And he had a wife and a place and enough to eat, and if he didn't get very far, perhaps his kids would — what?"

And she kinder smiled, sadlike, and says: "I'm sorry for the woman, Jim; for perhaps she was plenty contented, just with him — like me," she says, "as we used to be." So I began to wonder then about her, — the woman, — and whether she was back on the little truck-farm, and how she was getting on by herself, and so on. And the next day, when Pete Sotus was hating the rich with his bulgy forehead, I spoke to him about it.

"Where's your wife, Pete?" says I. "Why don't you send for her?"

He kinder waked up, smiling for a second, like he was going to say something nice about her, and then there he stood, the big hunk of scowls and misery and hate again. "Poof!" says he, just like a potato busting its skin. "She don't know it — der equvality. Vas is she know of der brodderhood of mans? She vill not

listen to der light. She is happy vid slafery — like vonce vas I. By Gott — no! In der social organisms, vat is she? Vat am I? Poof! It is to me to vork and der vages save to go vid Chicago and spread der vord of Mister Blacksong. Me? I will be an apostle. A vife is noddng. You and I is noddngs. Der doctrines is everytink."

"She may starve," says I; "and if she does, I'll fill your face with this fist full of fingers," I says, "you big fool," I says.

"Starve?" he says. "So vill I. Vat is der difference? I starve der to-day ven for der light and brodderhood of mans goes it to-morrow. It vas like dis vid me," he says, "I vas bring der load of celery into der wholesale houses. Say a man vat is friend to Mister Blacksong, 'Come vid me to der meetings!' So vas I made der light to see. Gott! Equavility! Happiness for all mans! It is der same vedder I starve or not!" he says, just like that.

And he went on talking about right to so many acres of land, and telling how this Blacksong feller had come out to see him on his little truck-farm, and told him what rights had been handed down to him because he was a man, and not a horse; and how Blacksong was in the business of the brotherhood of man for the good of all the people alive or that would be alive. And he told how he woke up to the light, as he called it, and didn't go out and dig cabbages, but chewed the rag back and

forth with his wife for a good many days. And it seemed that Blacksong thought it was no use to try to make her see — she was that stubborn; and it seemed that by and by Blacksong tells Pete to give his life to the cause and learn to preach, and all like that. And Pete came away.

It was all this Blacksong feller's scheme, and let me tell you, Blacksong was all right! He was an educated feller, and could repeat words from books he'd read, and he'd written some himself, too, Pete said. Seemed he'd gone and lived with the coal-miners, or something. Yes, he was smart, I guess, and he had plenty to eat, all right. He had money enough to buy meals in one of them cheap wine restaurants. I guess he was different from Pete Sotus. I guess he didn't have to go hungry and leave his wife, if he had one, to be whatever he was; he didn't look to me like a man who'd suffered very much for his doctrines and propaganda, as they called 'em.

He was a healthy loafer, making a living out of telling people what he knew. Pete had his picture. He wore long hair, like one of these imitation football players, and a big black necktie, like a woman's, and he used to tell Pete he was glad he come from common people. His face looked it! But I found out since that his father owned a soap factory in Brusselsville, Indiana; and they tell me this great Blacksong afterward lost all the money he'd made writing for the magazines by getting an inside tip of the stock of a pineapple farm.

It's funny, too, but I kinder believe he thought he was real goods himself. He meant what he said, and I guess he thought he'd done Pete Sotus a good turn and made a man out of an animal, and he wanted to have it get into the papers, and he preached so much about the brotherhood of man that he made Pete hate everybody.

And I guess Pete got to hating himself. I never seen so miserable a feller. Couldn't sleep nights, and kept us awake walking up and down his little room, and he'd go to work next morning black under the eyes, like he was one of these rich boys and not a two-fifty-pound laborer with a chest as big as a horse's and an appetite.

Pete was getting worse and more miserable all the time. And one night he stayed up in the kitchen till daylight come, trying to write something on the back of a time slip, and burning up ten cents' worth of oil. My girl Annie thought he was trying to write to his wife. But it was no go. He could read if he took time to it, but there weren't any penmanship, or whatever they call it, belonging to them big bologna fingers!

"He'd better go back to her," says Annie to me, "or he'll get so unhappy he'll kill somebody — himself, maybe. And ain't it awful to see the misery on such a *stupid* face?" she says.

"He'll not go back to her for any talking I can do now," I says. "Maybe you don't know it," I says, "but this Blacksong feller has been in town two days already,

talking his ideas to the Canucks and Poles," I says. "And," I says, "I'm not sure I wouldn't agree with some of 'em," I says. "Damn the Boss," I says.

But she stopped me with a move of her hand, and I went off wondering, and not knowing how sudden we were going to lose our lodger.

That Monday evening Annie was sewing, and I was reading in the parlor, when we heard steps outside. You'd thought it was Pete himself, big and clumsy.

"Poor feller," says Annie. But it weren't him! No, it was a woman. It was his wife. We knew it the minute we seen her. She was near as big as him, and wore men's shoes and had a blue dress made out of overall cloth and big red wrists sticking out, and working the farm in the sun had made her red all over her face, and she wore an apron like them dago women when they go anywhere, just the way anybody else would put on a hat. She was so big she looked like a man.

But my Annie knew. All women know each other. And she says, says she, "For the love of Heaven, sit down, you poor thing!" like that. It was just as if this other woman, with her flat, stupid face, had told her the whole story about how she'd worked the farm alone and been lonely and followed Blacksong up to one town because she thought she'd find her man, and tramped around till she'd found where Pete worked and where he lived, and how tired she was and all that. And there she sat staring around with her big blue eyes.

There was an awful lot of difference between my wife there and his. But Annie — well, she's a woman, and she put her arms around this foreigner and touched her on the hair, see? And I forgot to say you never seen such hair! Kind of gold hair it was, and it was worth looking at. There weren't no bonnet over it. And before she'd said a word, she looked up at my Annie like a half-frozen dog when you let it into the house. And I guess she knew more about the sisterhood of women right then than Blacksong ever preached to Pete about the brotherhood of man. Annie she stood beside this big freight-handler of a woman and I sat across the table and waited for her to tell it.

"I vant my mans," says she, by and by. "I vant my mans."

"He lives here," says Annie, "but he's out." And with that she looked at the clock and says, "But don't you worry; he'll be back."

Well, it took this foreigner woman near as long as it takes to boil an egg to get this into her head, but then you could see it was a comfort to her to know she'd made home plate. I could see she was thinking again, and when she bust out talking it was worse than Pete ever thought of. He couldn't have done so bad if he tried, and if we all had to talk English like hers we'd go back to the deaf and dumb alphabet.

And she didn't hold none of her business back. "I vant my mans," she says, as she starts off. "Ve to this

country came by four years vat is.” Her talk was something like that. And she says, pulling her big red fingers, “To him by vife made and lif in small place and there is vat is digging and make grow vat is cabbages, celery, and such. Dis is your vife,” she says to me, pointing to Annie. “Yes — to you both vill I speak. A man vat is has come to see my man and tell it to him many things vat is.”

“Blacksong?” says I, and she hoisted up her round, thick head and give me a nod.

“And, ah, Gott!” she says, looking into the light of the lamp, and enough to make a sweatshop foreman sorry for her. “Oh, Gott,” she says, “it has without him much unhappy been.”

Annie kinder looked at the floor, and I says, for vant of better, says I, “He’ll be in presently.”

She didn’t seem to hear me none. Just like somebody asleep, and she shut her eyes just like she was down and out.

“Ve vas happy by dese times vat was,” says she, and she put her arms down on the table and her head went down after ’em, and there she lay with the light on that hair of hers. Not crying — see — just DONE — a big, thick-headed foreigner woman that didn’t know nothing!

“Let her be,” says Annie, and I nodded, and we sat down and waited for Pete to come home from his meeting.

I guess it must have been near to eleven o'clock when we heard him on the walk. And he had Blacksong with him — the feller he called his only friend on earth.

And they was talking as they come up, and the foreigner woman woke up. She'd heard his voice, see? And she sits up straight and smooths down her apron and says, "My man!" like that, sorter proud. Yes, proud!

It was a surprise to him all right when he opened the door and seen her. Blacksong, — and I remember now his first name was Edgar, — he kinder started guessing himself. Pete just stood looking and looking back to his wife, and took his hat off and pulled his yellow hair with his fingers; but the other feller fixed up his big bow necktie and says, "You, sister?" And opened his white hands forward — like this, see?

Why, she never paid no attention to him! No, sir! She just looked at Pete and got up, and her big red hands hung down at her side, and she kinder caught her breath and then tried again. I was kinder afraid she'd talk her foreign lingo, but she didn't.

"Der dog is dead," she says, "vich bad is. But der is many shickens."

Pete, he still give her his stupid stare.

"I make der plenty celery to grow vid vork," she says.

"Vid vork?" says he, kinder like it was a dream.

"Please make der listen," says she. "I haf pay der rent."

With that I seen Blacksong give a sniff and look at Pete, but the foreigner just stared and stared, and finally he says, looking at her, "Vat is it you vant?"

"I vant you — vid me to go," she says.

"And give up the cause, brother?" puts in the equality feller, "and be an animal — the man with the hoe?" he says, paying no more attention to Annie and me than if we was chairs.

"Please do not telled it like that vonce more," says she, turning to Blacksong. "No, please, I vant my man. By and by, ven der little ones come has, vant I him." You'd thought she was asking the feller to give her back a handful of nickels or something.

And Pete got red and bulgy on the forehead and looked at me and Annie, and we never says a word.

"Mister Blacksong — please," says the woman. "You haf not good made. Ven my man vas happy and made it not to hate nobody, and ven everybody and every little thing, like der dog vas is dead, vas by him love gave. Please, Mister Blacksong, I tell it to you. Me he loved also."

She kinder looked at the floor and then looked up again. Pete, he was redder than ever, trying to figure out something, and he says, as if he was thinking, "Equvality! Der animals vat I was."

"Exactly," says Blacksong, kinder frightened.

"And der rent is payid. Please come back, and happiness be — like it vas before," says the woman.

"Please, Mister Blacksong, to him no more tell it. He loves little things, and dis is better than is it to make no love for nothing," she says.

Well, you'd thought she'd struck Pete with a welting-needle! He kinder stiffened up, and I remember the stare went out of his eyes, and Annie give a little cry, being a woman and afraid.

"Mister Blacksong," says Pete, very quiet in his voice and with his big shoulders rolling. "For you I from dis voman away vent. I haf made it hungry, and I haf been exactly sadness. Der truth is it vat you haf made me to learn, perhaps. By Gott, I vas happy! I loved every little fly vat made himself to sit down on der floor in der sunlight. By Gott, Mister Blacksong, I do not love dem now! Der is somethings vat is bad to haf men tell it to peoples. Vy should I not go on to vork vid happiness and not this equvality learn?" he says. "By Gott, Mister Blacksong, do you know vat you haf done? No! Vat is der difference to you vid your teachings der propaganda and doctrines, eh? By Gott, Mister Blacksong, you haf made me to see," he says, working his fingers in the air. "And you haf made me learn it to *hate!*"

And he stopped a minute, and his eyes were round and his big chest was moving.

And he says very soft, says he, "And so, Mister Blacksong, I must to kill you!"

And before I could stop him, he'd reached out with

them big arms of his and his body went over after 'em. And he caught Blacksong by the throat with his thick, yellow-haired fingers, and kneeled upon his chest, and the poor cuss squealed like a burnt pig.

The foreign woman helped me to pull at Pete Sotus. Blacksong's face got white and then gray. Great Guns! it looked different from them red fingers of Pete Sotus. I thought we'd be too late — the big foreigner was that strong I couldn't tear him off. But finally we pried him loose and got the preaching feller on to his feet, and Annie picked up his hat, and I grabbed him by the collar and shoved him out the door, while the foreigner woman held on to the big one.

Blacksong got himself together outside. He could hardly speak. It sounded like a voice through a partition. "I'll send him to the jail for this!" he says, croaking it out.

"Gwan," says I, "before I kick you down the steps," says I; "you and your man with a hoe," says I.

And when I turns to go back into the room, if there weren't the foreigner woman sitting in a chair; and Pete Sotus down on his knees with his yeller hair laid down in her checkered apron. She, with her red, stupid face, was talking her lingo kinder soft, but all he would say was: "Like it vas once! Like it vas once! I vant der slaferi! I vant der slaferi! I vant der slaferi!" and he said it over and over like a fool.

Well, my Annie — she pulled me out of the room,

and when we didn't hear no more noise, I looked in again. It was an hour or so, but they was gone — both of 'em. Pete left a dollar for rent under the lamp — bright green-looking it was on the wooden top. Pete loved that woman. She was big and red and homely, but thunder! she was his wife. They'd gone — they'd gone together.

I went out to the back door then and opened it. The air felt good. There was the sky just peppered with stars. The horse out in the barn heard me, I guess, because he stamped in his stall once or twice, as if he would like to have me go out and speak to him; and the last crickets were singing in the grass. I looked up at the big space overhead and over the fields at the mist that was hanging above 'em, and somehow I felt as if I was the only human being ever made, and that the One that made me was looking down at me and studying me to see what He had turned out. And standing there, it come to me as if He had whispered in my ear. And I knew there wasn't nothing in the world worth having but good-will to every feller and woman and mosquito and rock and twigs on trees and everything. I just stood there, half scared and half happy.

And for the first time in twenty years tears I thought had long ago dried up, come back, and I kinder jumped when I felt the wet in the corner of my eye, and I looked out across them fields and I says to Him, "Don't worry about me," I says. "I won't hold nothing against any-

body any more. Look out for my girl," I says, "wherever she may be, and keep her from any harm," I says; and I went back into the house, and I looked into the door of the room where little John and Michael was sleeping, and I says to myself that it would pay a man to go out every night in the air like that, and there hasn't been a night since that I haven't done it. And then I went to bed.

CHAPTER XXII

MAYBE some people will think it strange, but I half expected it. It weren't three evenings after that I laid down my pipe and the newspaper that had some reports about the strike and people leaving town, and I felt a restless feeling come over me. So I got up and turned up my collar, for it was one of them sharp evenings that smell like winter, and went out on to the front door-step. I seen it wouldn't be long before we would have snow, and the ice would be booming in the river again, and the white hills would shine Sunday mornings so you could hardly see for the water the cold had brought into your eyes. And I was thinking so when I heard the gate click.

She came out of the dark the way a camera picture comes out on a plate. I thought a second that she weren't real, and then I saw her eyes, so clear and round.

"Did I surprise you?" she says, in a voice that shook a bit. "Aren't you glad to see me?"

I could hardly speak. I grabbed her. "Katherine!" I says, "my girl — my little girl!"

She wriggled a little and put her bag on the ground and her arms around my neck.

And after a minute she says, "My mother?" she says.

Of course I wanted to ask her questions, but I could see she was crazy to rush inside.

"Wait a second," says I, very serious. "Your mother is in the parlor. Be patient with what she may say to you. She may be very slow to forgive you," I says; "and say nothing about how your father welcomed you, for it was different from what I had planned," I says. "Be careful now, Katherine," I says. "She is your mother, and has a right to be very stern with you," says I.

And with that we pushed open the door a little way, and I whispers to the girl, "Remember, Katherine," I says, "that you have made your mother more angry and more bitter and unforgiving than I ever saw her before." And then Katherine went in alone.

I was just outside. I never seen my Annie so active. She just seemed to leap out of her chair and over the edge of the table.

"Katherine!" she screams. "You're back, dearest! Oh, my! Oh, my!" she cries. "Come to your mother," she says, and put her hand on the girl's shoulders and held her off and looked at her face that was so happy and excited. And then she stopped her chuckling and little words and looked serious. "I fear to have you meet your father," she says. "He will never forgive your going away. He's like a raging fire," she says.

And so it was the girl came back. She took off her coat, and my Annie went to her again, and I seen her look

her in the eyes, asking questions without words, the way a mother will. But Katherine only smiled back at her, and I came in, and then after Annie and I seen how we stood, we started to ask her questions.

“Katherine, dear, you had a fool’s errand. I don’t like to hear about it,” says my Annie. “But tell me,” she says, “have you seen him?”

“Yes,” says Katherine, so soft you could hardly hear her.

“And what then?” says I.

She looked up at me. “And then,” she says, “he went back to college, and when he has arranged things there, he is coming back to show he isn’t afraid of this town, either,” she says, and I could see in her eye the look of fight. “He promised *me*,” she says, and her rounded chin kinder squared up.

“Have you anything else to tell us?” says Annie, very slow, as if it was hard to say.

Then the look on the girl’s face changed. You could see the shadow come over it. “No,” she says; “I found him in Richmond,” she says. “He had a job with contractors there, and a pair of blue overalls and a streak of machine grease on his face. It seemed so funny! And I told him what he must do. I got there about the time the whistle blew, and we got nothing to eat that night, for sitting on the Capitol steps and walking around the grounds with the city below us and the puffing of trains,” she says.

"I know — I know," I says, very impatient. "But did he ask you to forgive him? What did he say about the Villet girl?" I says.

With that Katherine kinder bent her head till the back of her neck was tight and glistening in the lamp-light below the line of that copper-colored hair of hers. And she looked at the floor and whispers, "What we thought about him must be true," she says, and swallowed as if there was a fish-bone in her throat. "But he asked me again if I believed it," she says, "and I said yes, and asked him to explain, but he only said he couldn't explain anything, that I was like his father — without faith," she says.

"Oh!" cries my Annie. "This miserable coward!" she says. "He could at least have been straight enough to admit it, like a man," she says, "to you who had done so much for him."

"He was silent as a stone," says Katherine, thinking. "He only said that he would never say any more — that what he owed to Anne Villet was for her to say."

"And we will never see her again," says I.

"Maybe we will," says Katherine. "I found out where she is. I've sent for her. It was hard for him to go back to his friends; it will be hard for him to come to this town, not knowing whether he can go under the roof of his father's house or not; but he must do something more!" she says. "He must pay his debt to her!"

I seen Annie's eyes grow big with her thoughts, and her hands went playing along her dress for a minute. "You love him?" she says.

"Yes," says Katherine, "I guess I must. I guess it was intended to have me."

"And you told him so?" I says.

"No," she says. "It was pride for you and mother and all of us. I told his father once he must come with Bob if they wanted to know. And that's the way it will have to be," she says.

With that I seen Annie's eyes redden up, and she half went down on her knees beside Katherine's chair, and took her hands, and the next minute she looked up at me and says, "Jim, Jim, it's our own girl, dear. She belongs to us! Don't you see, Jim! She is such a *woman!*"

CHAPTER XXIII

AND in those next few days I made up my mind her mother hadn't praised her too high. I knew what was in the girl's heart and how she had to keep it there and not let it out. And I remembered how I read in a book that these fellers that go hunting for lions often find 'em travelling in pairs and always get the lioness out of the way first, because if the other is wounded she'll fight like hell for him. I knew Katherine was like that, and yet I could see how gentle she could be.

The strike had made a lot of misery in the town, and it seemed as if everybody was getting sick, and there was a lot of the little money that was left spent for pool-playing and excursions and betting on ball-games and drink. The idleness was awful. And the cost of it was awful in a dozen ways, and ever since then I've known that work and labor and plugging at it day after day is the sweetest thing in the world.

But Katherine was always doing something. There was a lot of people needing help — maybe a woman with the pneumonia and no one to cook the meals for the children, or a feller that was begging the grocer to wait a bit for his money, and so many kinds of troubles that a man couldn't ever believe that trouble could have so

many shapes. And the way the girl worked to set things straight reminded me of the way one of them mud-wasps works — all the time and patient, putting on a little here and a little there to the nest, and never dissatisfied because one day wouldn't make much of a showing. There was a kind of a reflection of my Annie in the girl. I learned a new kind of love of her.

It was right at that time that the Talker came to this town. The autumn had about given its last gasp, like a fish dying in the bottom of a boat, and the valley was all lit up with the colors of the trees, and the marshes was brown and spitting up them sounds of guns and white smoke where the idle fellers was out shooting partridges and watching for the first snow so they could go out after them hares. I never knew a fall when hunting-dogs was in such demand.

I remember I seen him come over the rise at the top of Maple Hill, and I didn't know then that he was a talker that could take first, second, and third and honorable mention, barring women.

I remember it was in the morning. And somehow I happened to look up and I seen his queer wagon just starting down the hill for the bridge, with the brakes scraping, and the old white horse with his ears down and watching for round stones.

The wagon was a color that would frighten the insurance companies, and on the sides of it was painted a question-mark most as tall as a man. That was all

except for him. He sat on the seat under a big cotton umbrella. I could see his eye-glasses flashing in the sunlight.

But it weren't till noon that I got a close look at him. I was going up over the road home, and I seen his wagon out in front of Dunham's livery stable that used to be facing the old village common under them big elm trees on Main Street. I'd loaned Birch Dunham my harness, and I thought it would be a good time to run across and get it, and I found this red-wagon feller setting in the doorway where the flies that is most froze to death at night buzzes in the daytimes. There didn't seem to be nobody there except him and them flies. You know how still a livery stable can be. He was polishing his glasses on a silk handkerchief about as big as a table-cover.

I remember he was setting under one of them pictures of Doctor Vetter, the horse's friend, because those liniment advertisements show that Vetter is happy and fat, and this feller that sat under the picture was so thin he seemed to take a lot of comfort in winding his legs around each other when he got into a chair; and he had a solemn white face with sleepy eyes that when they opened would bore through the side of a house, and a mustache that went right on after it had stopped being a mustache and followed his jaws right up close until it ran into his slick black hair. There weren't nothing about him that would tell that he was old,

but somehow you knew he was. He was kinder pale, too. Afterward, when I found out he'd been in jail, I wondered why I hadn't known of it to look at him. It won't wash off a man and don't wear off easy.

"There ain't nobody here," he says, "but me," he says, in a kind of a singsong. "But the gentleman for whose kindly offices them horses is stamping will be back in a few minutes," says he.

So with that I sat down in the sun, too, and looked at the feller and he looked at me.

"I suppose you live in this town?" says he.

"Yes," I says. "I'm foreman in the factory when there ain't a strike. I seen your wagon coming down over the hill this morning. What are them question-marks?" says I.

"Them," he says, "represents the human mind. Everybody asks the same question. That's what they're meant for. If all human minds weren't so much alike, a lot of folks wouldn't care what them question-marks were. But everybody asks! You ask!" says he, in his singsong. "A question-mark asks. It asks you to ask. And when anybody asks, I tell 'em."

"Tell 'em what?" I says.

He leaned forward toward me and looked me square in the eye and laughed, and pulled out of his pocket a little file and commenced filing one of his long white finger-nails.

"Tell 'em what?" I says, again.

“Well, I say to ’em something like this,” he says, not looking up. “When youse is asleep in your bed, you do not dream that a band of Indians wise to nature’s everlasting laws and the secrets of the great Man too is roaming the hills, valleys, woodlands, mountains, plains, plateaus, peaks, and marshes gathering sprouts, buds, flowers, roots, twigs, bark, stems, leaves, seeds, and bulbs from which is distilled a soothing, healing, comforting, pain-killing, disease-conquering, death-defying, remedy now represented in this bottle I hold in my hand open to inspection and plain to your naked eyes —”

“What bottle?” says I, kinder lost in the up and down pumping sound of his voice.

“Don’t bother,” says he. “I’m supposed to have a bottle in this hand, see? And to continue — which remedy is good for aches, pains, bruises, sprains, sore back, tender feet, falling of the hair — also for insomnia, the disease that doctors often calls sleeplessness, and malaria, rheumatism and gout, indigestion, and all such kindred ailments. The price of this remedy is not ten dollars, not five dollars, not even one dollar, gentlemen. The few left are sold to-night for fifty cents, half a dollar, five dimes! And with each and every bottle we give away one of the combination pens, corkscrews, glass-cutters, and can-openers!”

“I see,” says I. “You’re a travelling doctor.”

“Perfesser,” he says, correcting me. “And as a

matter of fact, I've given up that Piute Remedy line. This summer I'm carrying soaps, hair tonics, clothes hangers, and Smith's wart and blemish remover," says he, working away with his little nail-file. "For when you're carrying Indian remedies you have to have an Indian. They're all alike. The last one I had was a Baltimore nigger," he says, "and once I had a real Indian, but he used to get homesick and cry. I was disgusted."

With that he held up his long white finger in the sunlight and looked at it as if he'd just made it himself. "Yep," says he, "I'm perfesser. I guess I'm a perfesser of talking — that's me. That's all I am and all I'll ever be good for," he says. "Once I thought — but that's gone long ago, and awful long ago at that. But I'm an artist in my line. I make a pretty good thing of it, and my stuff's good, honest stuff, too, except the wart remover. Even that kinder bleaches 'em. But when I get going I can talk a bird out of a tree. Yes, sir. I can talk a man's head out from under his hat. It's too bad it couldn't never been turned to good account. Good talkers oughter be careful not to do any harm."

And I knew he was right. He sat there watching the stream of men and women going in and out of the post-office, walking slow, and seemed to be studying each one of 'em just as if he was used to studying everybody he saw. Now and then he'd wrinkle his nose to let

his spectacles fall down into place, but all the time he talked I had to look at him. I had to listen. I suppose it's a good deal in practice, but maybe people is born talkers.

I says to him, "Have you got eye trouble?"

"No," he says, "these glasses is just plain glass. But," he says, as if he thought I was a fool, "what's a perfesser without glasses? I wear glasses for the same reason I wear this tall celluloid collar that cuts my neck, and this black necktie," he says. "It's a fake. But I don't know nobody that ain't a faker one way or another," says he. "Most of their faking is funny. It don't do no harm. It's like an old dog without teeth making a lot of noise. That's me," he says.

And then all of a sudden he leaned forward, and the front legs of his chair come down with a bang that started up all them flies.

"Who's that?" he yells to me in a kinder whisper. I seen his long fingers press on his nail-file till it bust with a snap, and the two pieces fell on the floor. I seen he was looking across the road, and he was pointing with one hand.

There was a lot of folks on the other side of the street, and I couldn't tell who he meant.

"Which is who?" I says.

"The one with a little mustache," he says, choking and red, and his fingers feeling along his coat buttons.

"That's Carter Elmore, the Boss's son-in-law," says I,

kinder excited, for you catch them feelings like a disease. And he jumped as if I'd stuck a hat pin into his leg.

He stood there looking, and by and by he let out a breath as if it hurt him, and he says, "It's him. It's him!" and he kinder whistled it between his thin lips. And then he sits down in the chair again and takes off his big black hat and smoothed it out on his knee and kept snapping dust specks off it with his long, pointed finger-nails. "And after all this time, too," he says.

"Is he married?" he says, wetting his lips.

"Yes," I says, "he married the Boss's daughter. They live in New York. He's just been visiting here this summer with his wife."

"How's she?" he says, looking at the floor.

"Who's that?" I says.

"The wife — his wife," he says. "Does she still have that little laugh?" he says. "And her black hair? Or maybe she's bleached it now," he says.

"No," I says, "you've got the wrong people," I says. "His wife ain't like the woman you describe," I says. "Did you think you knew him?" says I.

"Oh, no!" he says, looking up quick. "I was just joking."

With that he got up and began walking up and down the floor, and after a while he looks at me over his glasses and says, "I don't suppose a bookkeeper can make enough to take care of a big family."

"Why, he ain't a bookkeeper," I says. "He's a a broker in New York. He makes a lot of money."

"Is his wife small?" he says, plucking his fingers with his other hand.

"No," I says, "she stands as tall as I do," I says.

"No children?" he says.

"No," says I, "just them two;" and I was watching Carter Elmore walking along on the other side of the street, swinging a cane as he went.

"No children?" the Talker says, kinder soft. "Well, that's different;" and he wipes his mouth with the back of his hand.

And when I looked up again he was standing there on the stable floor with a revolver in his hand. He kinder patted it with his other fingers and he says: "Now there's a good weapon," he says. "I bought that seven years ago. I thought maybe I'd have some use for it," he says. "Ain't it funny how you plan things, and how you picture 'em over and over again, and when the time comes everything is different? Ain't it strange?"

"And it's funny, too," he says, "how people change, and how you will be sure you'll know people you haven't seen for fifteen years, and when you meet 'em again you can't be sure. And yet a little thing like a wart or a birthmark or a tattoo on the skin would be enough, if you can only see it, to tell the story, even though names and everything else has changed." And he

looked at the revolver again and put it back in his hip pocket.

"I suppose you need that," I says, speaking up, "travelling as you do from town to town alone on the road."

"No, I guess not," he says. "I didn't buy it for that. I bought it to shoot a man when I found him." And with that he laughed and wrinkled his nose again to let his eye-glasses drop into place. "Ain't it a funny world?" he says. "I bust my nail-file," he says, stooping down and picking up one piece of it. "Ain't that too bad?"

"Look here," I says, for I'd been thinking, "you don't mean Carter Elmore is the feller you've been looking for?"

"No," he says, "I guess he ain't the one. But you won't say nothing about it, anyhow, will you?"

"I won't," I says, and Birch Dunham come in just then and I had to talk with him; and when I looked back over my shoulder, I seen the perfesser had gone back to sit in his chair, just as I first seen him in the sunlight, with the flies buzzing around and with his big black hat setting on his gray head again, and the little piece of nail-file turning around and around in his fingers, and his sleepy eyes looking way off on to that ridge of pines there where the crows is always flying in circles.

CHAPTER XXIV

It weren't till that night I seen him again. And I won't forget it, neither.

I remember I went down to the village that evening. I told my Annie that I'd be right back, but going down Maple Street I met Father Ryan. He's an artist for passing the time of day, and it's fine to see the smile on that red face of his.

We walked along down toward the stores, up by the drinking fountain, and when we turned the corner we see the perfessor's wagon backed up against the side of the Odd Fellows' building. There was a couple of gasoline lights flaming and blazing away on each side of it, and it was a sight to see how, when that wagon had opened up, it was changed into a regular travelling store, with a counter out front and shelves behind and a platform for the perfessor to stand on.

And the perfessor was there himself, standing with a cornet in one hand, playing it, and a big drum-beater, or whatever you call 'em, whacking at a bass drum with the other hand, all at the same time. I thought to myself, "You may be talented in one direction, but it ain't in music." But of course that didn't make any difference. The idea was to make noise.

Then, besides, whenever the gasoline flared up good you could see a big snake wound around the professor's neck and swinging his head back and forth.

"Jim," says Father Ryan to me, "those are bad men — those like him — selling worthless stuff to the poor. You may expect to see 'em in the summer, but seldom so late as this — when winter is nearly on us and a strike in the town, too," he says. "Just see how everybody is running. I don't approve of it — not a bit," he says. "'Tis a bad influence, and I'm surprised to see men like Pierson and Joline and Henry Morse is open to such curiosity," he says. "What's that the rascal has around his neck?" he says.

"A snake," says I.

"A real snake?" says he. "And see him now. He's blind-folding himself. What do you suppose he's going to do?"

"I don't know," says I.

"I wish I did," he says. "Do you suppose it would do any harm if we drew nearer?" he says.

"Your Reverence shouldn't be a party to this proceeding," I says, "even as a spectator," I says. "Maybe," says I, "I offer it for a suggestion," I says, with a grin.

"Look there," he says, "he's doing a trick with a man's hat," he says. "Did you ever see the like of that crowd? If we're going to see anything, we must go as fast as our two legs will carry us."

"We have four legs between us," says I.

"I wish I had a hundred," he says, almost running. "I'm fond of hearing them rascals talk," he says. "Come on," he says. "'Twill be sad for you when you're less of a boy than me, Jim, though don't say I said it, or folks will find out I have no respect for own my white hair," he says, puffing and blowing and keeping in the shadows of the bare elm trees where nobody'd see him.

The crowd was all pressing and pushing and pulling, old and young, around the cart. You could see the faces turned up and shining red and yellow in the light of the gasoline torches. And even all the old fellers' eyes were glistening, and right then anybody could tell that men grow up a little in a lifetime, but the oldest man in the world dies young. I guess I was like the others, anxious to hear and see, though I never suspected what would turn up. And I looks around beside me and Father Ryan's mouth was open as wide as temptation, and while the perfesser talked in his singsong way, his Reverence beat time with his finger just as if he was teaching poetry to the kids at the parochial school.

"Move up closer there in front, please," says the perfesser, "for I see there's more coming, and them who is standing back there," he says, pointing with his long finger and winking, "is the most curious. And now, brothers," he says, "if you will give me your attention for a moment or two, I'll present to your notice a marvellous new discovery. In the meantime I'll wash my

hands in this here basin, using, as you see, ordinary water just as it runs from a pump, a faucet, water spigot, or garden hose. And from this here tin with patent perforated top — you can see, Clarence, without climbing on to my wagon — from this here tin I shake a couple of flakes of this here substance on to the palm of my hand,” he says.

“And,” he says, dipping his hands into the water, “here is where the rub comes,” he says. “When I was in Catacomb, Ohio, a year ago, a little boy in the crowd says to me, ‘Doc Smith, do my hands need washing?’ I says, ‘They certainly do, young man.’ ‘Well,’ he says, ‘you oughter see mother’s face.’”

And as he was talking he rubbed up a big lather that stood half a foot high, and then he told how that lather weren’t like ordinary soap, but how it went into the pores of the skin and killed the germs; and then he went on talking and rubbing until the lather was all gone and his hands was dry and he’d wiped ’em on a towel. But then he’d pour some more clean water over ’em, and the same lather would work right up again just as white and frothy as ever, and I guess he did it four times.

The crowd was listening and looking at him every second, and finally an old feller from one of the farms out on the Dalton Road snorted out and says, “Doc, that’s great stuff, that soap, but how in blazes do you ever get shed of it?”

Everybody laughed and shifted their feet and thought the joke was on the perfesser, but it didn't bother him any. He looks up over his glasses and says: "I'm surprised you didn't know," he says. "When you've got a good lather worked up, just hang it up on a hook and use it when you come back," he says.

"Now this marvellous antiseptic, cleansing, purifying, germ-destroying, strictly scientific preparation," he says, leaning forward till I thought he'd fall over, "is known to the wide world as 'Smith's Twelve-Horse-Power Magic Flake.' It is good for hands, face, bath, hair, dandruff, and all skin troubles; for man and beast, horse, dog, and cat, and may be used to wash woollens, laces, silk; will remove the stains from clothing, including the most delicate fabrics; will clean silver, china, brass, and porcelain, varnish, furniture, spots on wall-paper and plaster-paris statuary; soothing and allaying irritation after shaving. With each and every can of this powder which I sell here to-night I give away one of these here Swiss metal watch-charms. Not only that, but I add to it one of these here sets of open-eye needles that will save the fingers and eyesight of your old mother, grandmother, or wife, sister, aunt, or daughter, equally as well," he says. "The price of this giant household combination is three dollars and ninety cents."

"Gee!" says three or four in the crowd, and with that the perfesser looked up at the swinging branches of

the tree that hung down beside him, where the leaves kinder took the light from the gasoline.

"Well," he says, "who's the first?" he says, holding out the articles. "Nobody?" he says. "Oh, well," he says, "I forgot to mention that three dollars and ninety cents, or thirty-nine dimes, was the original price of this outfit, but to introduce these here articles quick on the market, I'm going to sell 'em off to-night at a different price. Not a dollar, not a half, quarter, or eighth of a dollar, but one dime, ten cents, the tenth part of a dollar. Let them gentlemen come close, please," he says. "One right here. I've got your change right there. And the next one here. A few more left now. One here to this gentleman. Don't crowd. Another here. Wait a bit; you'll get yours in a minute, brother."

And on he went selling 'em right and left, swaying his body from side to side, and keeping on talking with a voice that sounded up and down, and pumping and running all the words together. And just the second he seen the sales was going slow he stopped and wiped off all the packages left on his stand into a box with his arm, and reaches down as quick as a wink and pulls out the snake again and holds it up.

"Now," he says, "we will do an act to conclude the performance. I want to entertain you a minute with a description of this monster captured in the wilds of Florida. This snake is the alligator or spotted snake,

from which the native Indians distil the oil that goes into a little preparation I have here to-night. Now my contention is that every man alive has got on him somewhere a mole or blemish of the skin. I'll go farther than this, brothers. I'll prove it right here before you without any attempt to conceal, or other deception."

"Ain't he the rascal!" says Father Ryan in my ear. "Just look at him now!"

I seen then the perfesser had stopped and was looking around in the crowd. He looked kinder worn and old and tired, too, and I seen his hand go up to his collar and pull at it as if to let in more air. He finally pointed to a long, tall feller that works on the railroad.

"You've got one," he says, "you with the gray felt hat," he says. "But you ain't never seen it. And yet you know you've got it. It's on the back of your neck."

The feller opened his eyes as wide as water crackers, and before he could stop, he says, "How did you know?"

"Easy, my friend," says the perfesser. "When I first spoke you felt to see if it was still there."

And he says, pointing to another feller by the name of Osborn, "You've got one on your left shoulder."

"No, I ain't," says the feller.

But he didn't say it loud, and so the perfesser went pointing around the crowd, saying, "You got one," and "You got one," and nobody could see who he was point-

ing at, so nobody denied it, and everybody laughed and whispered as if the perfesser was doing something wonderful, sure.

But when he come to one man on his way around, I noticed he stopped a minute and coughed, and I seen the man was Carter Elmore. And then the Talker says, kinder laughing: "There's a gentleman there with a pearl-gray felt hat on. And he's got a mole on the top side of his left wrist," he says, and he rested one hand on the stand and leaned forward. "How is that, brother?" he says, showing his teeth as he spoke.

I seen Elmore — course I ain't giving his real name — I seen Elmore jump a little. He'd been looking at the perfesser pretty steady, for I watched him, but he kinder looked away then and at the ground, and I seen him reach out and grab Dave Pierson's arm as if he was going to fall. Everybody was anxious to know if the perfesser had hit it right again, and so it was still, — even the crowd was still, — and you couldn't hear nothing but the warm wind in them trees and a train whistling way off somewhere down the line.

And finally the Boss's son-in-law straightened up and looked straight at the perfesser and nodded.

CHAPTER XXV

THE perfesser stepped back a little and took off his black hat and snapped at the dust on it with his finger. It seemed to me he was shaking a little, but nobody seemed to notice it, and he laughed and went on pointing out a couple more, cracking a joke for each, and telling how he knew a man that used a mole on the back of his hand to remember things by instead of tying a piece of string around his finger.

“And,” he says, “now I’ve proved everything, I’m going to present to your notice and attention this little box of salve composed and made up of natural oils of the famous Suwanee alligator, or spotted snake, known for centuries to Indians and explorers of that death-dealing swamp for their curative properties. Every box of this salve represents a daring capture perpetrated, maybe, at the cost of a human life, and is going to be sold to-night at the red-letter-day price of ten cents, together with a written and signed guarantee that the salve will remove any blemish or disfigurement in twenty-four hours, if used according to direction thereby given. Who’ll be first here? A genuine four-carat California diamond scarf-pin is given away with each box, providing no question is asked and nothing is said

about where you bought it. If this scarf-pin ain't worth at any jeweller's nine times what you pay me for it, bring it back to me, and I'll gladly hand you back the price. Who's next here? One dime," he says. "Your Canadian quarter is all right, young man. Another here. Here they come. Another here. Full directions given — the genuine Suwanee Snake Salve, as used by the court beauties of France for over a century. Thank you. Stand back there, please, after completing your purchase," he says. You know how them fellers go on.

But all of a sudden he stopped and looked up in the air and whistled. It seemed just as if he'd been thinking and suddenly hit upon just what he wanted to plan.

"Gents," he says, "we'll stop right here a moment. I'm going to tell you a story, gents," says he, keeping right on with his singsong voice — "a story that is all wool, a yard wide, and contains no shoddy or adulteration whatever," he says.

Of course I didn't know his story was going to affect me any.

"And now, gents," he says, "there was a feller fifteen years ago had a house just outside of Chicago — one of these little houses painted white and a picket fence around it," he says, "where the cat used to lie out in the sun on warm days in springs, and inside the fence was some flowers planted. And when the feller used to come home at night, his wife — and she was a pretty woman — used to pull off her apron and come out and

meet him. This here feller didn't amount to much as men go. He was a drummer, selling a line of bicycle bells and lamps, see? He weren't making much money, and he liked good clothes, and there weren't a great deal in his favor except his talking. He was a natural-born talker. He'd talk a man right out from under his hat."

With that the perfesser stopped and coughed and laid his black felt hat down on a pile of salve boxes and played with the buttons on his coat.

"Yes," he says, "there weren't much to him, I guess, except talk. And then maybe, besides, that he was fond of her—of that little woman. She was kinder pink, and she had the finest little laugh you ever listened to, and he carried her picture pasted in the front of his order-book so's every time he wrote an order he'd see her and think how he was earning a living for 'em both," he says.

"I ain't going to tell it long," says he. "I've got to sell some of these here goods, but this feller had a friend, a feller, we'll say, named Rayworth. He weren't an old friend nor nothing like that. He was a bookkeeper in a big hotel, and was a good deal younger than the husband, but he come from a first-rate family, and these two others let him have a room and board out in their house to help out expenses. The first feller was a fool. He was only a talker, and he didn't ever see during them months that Rayworth was making such good friends with the little woman. But Rayworth was a pretty good talker, too.

“Well,” says the perfesser, wiping his forehead, “Rayworth used to say that anybody who couldn’t make money and own a big house and carriages was a fool; and he told how all the big fellers had got rich first by selling nothing for something, and he explained about stock companies and how many suckers there was, and he said if he was as good a talker as this first feller he would go into it quick.

“The first feller didn’t know much about them things, but by and by it seemed just common business to fix up a company of some kind and sell stock and take the money and use it. It seemed just like what the big fellers did. And so then, gents, Rayworth taught this first feller how to do it, and all Rayworth asked for that teaching was a note promising so much money on a certain date out of the profits. That’s all Rayworth did. He was scared to have anything to do with the real business. Then one morning, when they was all sitting down to breakfast and everything was going fine and a whole lot of money had come in already, a ring came on the electric bell, and two big fellers walked straight in past the woman, for she had answered the bell, and they stood there looking at Rayworth and the coffee and eggs and bacon and muffins, and the talking feller still sitting there holding the blue coffee-cup his wife had bought for him when they first went to housekeeping. Yes, gents,” says the perfesser, “they stood there and laughed, and one of ’em says, ‘This is a pretty little nest,

ain't it?' and the other hands the talking feller a warrant and says, 'It's embezzlement, my friend, and we got the case tacked down in fifty places. Get your hat and coat and don't say nothing we can use against you.'

"Well, gents, the first thing the feller thought of was Rayworth and how, maybe, if that note could be destroyed, there wouldn't be nothing against him, and it just happened that the feller knew that the note was in Rayworth's overcoat pocket. And so the feller went out into the kitchen and put on Rayworth's coat instead of his own, and when he got a chance and the big inspector wasn't looking, he took all the papers out of the inside pocket and put 'em through a crack in the stove. And he did it to save Rayworth, and of course when that note was gone Rayworth was all clear."

The perfesser stopped again and turned one of them knobs on the gasoline torch so the light come up again good and bright, but you could see how white his face looked against the shadow of the tree on the wall behind. You could hear one feller trying to screw on a cover to his salve box.

"And then," says the perfesser, "the feller looked all around and smelled the nice warm smell inside the house she used to keep so clean, and then he looked at her. And when he seen she wasn't crying or nothing, he was frightened. She was standing there looking at him just as if she'd never seen him before. And he says, 'Ain't you going to say nothing?' And she says, 'No.

Mr. Rayworth told me two months ago that he was afraid you was in some dirty work and would get into trouble. But I only half believed him then.' And Rayworth stood behind her and said, 'That's so, Ed, but I hope I won't be asked to testify against you,' and then the feller knew that Rayworth had tricked him, and that anyhow he no longer had any home.

"And, gents, they sent that feller up for seven years, and the feller served six of it. It was really a hundred and eighty-two years. And she got a divorce from him. He couldn't do nothing about it. And Rayworth took the girl away and maybe he married her, though maybe he didn't. Anyhow, she belonged to him.

"So when the feller got out," says he, "it was just before Christmas, and he shook hands with the warden, and the warden says, 'Ed, keep out of trouble. Don't forget that you still wear that tattoo mark and picture of a ship on your forearm that was put there when you was almost a boy. It's still with you, and so's your record. Keep out of trouble.' And the feller walked out where there was the noise of trucks and mud in the streets and electric lights in the store windows, and he walked as far as a pawnshop. And the man there says, 'You look kinder sick.' But all the feller did was to buy a revolver, and then he started out to look for Rayworth. He'd found out already that Rayworth had got frightened, not knowing the note had been burned up, and was afraid that the feller would come out of prison and tell

on him or kill him; and so he'd changed his name, probably, and disappeared. But the feller was going to be patient, and something told him that he'd find Rayworth some day, and then he'd kill him. There weren't any real life of any kind left for him. He didn't know anybody or any place. He went back to look at the little house once, but they'd built a big apartment building there. And the main thing to do was to kill Rayworth when he found him. And he hunted for seven years."

Then the perfesser wiped his forehead again, for his face was all wet, and he pulled out the revolver he'd showed me and pointed it up in the air, and looked at it.

And he says, "Gents, suppose I said I was that feller. And suppose I said this was the revolver. And suppose I said that Rayworth was standing right down there among you and I could drop him like a dog."

At that the crowd kinder moved and there was a kinder rustle of whispers, and everybody watched him. And then after a minute I seen 'em all looking at each other. But the perfesser laid the gun down, and several of 'em gave a sigh. I could hear 'em.

"But suppose," says the perfesser, "I could do something worse than shooting him. Suppose he was known in this town. Suppose he was respected, and folks seen he was prosperous and come from good people and went with good people. Suppose he had left this first woman, perhaps, and married a second one, who

believed he was all right. Then suppose I took this long finger and pointed it at him now, as he stands down there with you and says, 'That's him!' He'd have to go away from this town, wouldn't he? He'd have to have his wife know what he was. He wouldn't ever know when I was going to turn up again. And suppose I followed him wherever he went and waited till he got settled and then pointed at him again and told it all over to folks the way I've told it to you. He couldn't stand that story, could he? I could break him in two just like he broke me in two. I could give him back them kind of days that I had when I used to set and bite my nails down, thinking I didn't have her any more or nothing, and feeling of the woollen in a striped suit and walking lockstep with a tin cup in my hand, and dreaming at night of that cat that used to set on the fence on spring days, and thinking I smelled the perfume that woman used.

"Well, gents," he says, after a minute, waiting and looking around on all sides of the red wagon, "what'll it be? I've waited seven years for this. What'll it be — the gun or the finger? Which?"

Everybody kinder looked back at him for a minute. The crowd moved a little this side and that like butter beans boiling in a kettle. I don't suppose anybody'd dared to go away. It would looked like they was the man who was guilty. I couldn't see Carter Elmore's face. He'd turned his back.

“Well, gents,” says the perfesser, “I ain’t anybody much — just a talker. But I can give up the gun and this here finger and point it and wreck him. And I want to know what’s right. I always thought I’d know when the time had come, but I’ve got to ask now. Shall I take this here finger,” he says, “and point it, or shall I shut my mouth? I’m asking, gents,” he says.

“Point him out!” yells Dave Pierson. “Point him out! We’ll run him outer this town.” And it seemed like it started everybody. You could hear ’em growling kinder soft and mean, like ugly collie dogs, and even Father Ryan beside me kinder choked in his throat, and I seen a look on his face I ain’t ever seen but twice.

“Of course, the only trouble,” says the perfesser, playing with his coat buttons, “is that none of you fellers knew him or the little woman that ran away from her husband. I guess I’d answer the way you do if I hadn’t been a part of this. But,” he says, just as if he was talking to himself, “it’s funny how little things come back now, ain’t it? I used to be mighty fond of that Rayworth. Once he and I went off shooting together, and we used to take lunches together days when I could get around to it. And of course you have to like a man pretty well to see him at breakfast and dinner and then go to lunch with him, too. I remember he bought me a box of cigars one time. I kinder knew it was a question whether he should spend the money on himself or me, and I was tickled to death with ’em. I liked him.

He was always talking about what we oughter do and how in years to come we'd take a trip to Europe together. He's right there amongst you now. He knows it's true. Of course, it ain't saying much, but I guess he was the best friend I ever had.

"And then there was her, wherever she may be now," he says. "I remember how much she cared about my orders. Why, she used to take my order-book and look it over, and when I'd made a big sale, she was just as glad as if she'd done it herself. And I remember how her laugh used to sound. And I've always wondered if it sounds the same now. You see, gents, she had a nice way about her, and tried so hard to help me different ways and plan so we could save money. I guess I never loved anybody much but her. I know I used to tell her I'd sacrifice anything for her sake. I guess I was mighty fond of her," says he.

With that he run his hand down into his collar again. And then he commenced to play with the boxes of salve just as if he was kinder embarrassed and ashamed. And by and by he looked up again, and everybody was watching him till their eyes hurt 'em and burned with staring.

"Well, gents," says he, "I guess you must be right. I oughter point my finger and wreck him. It's justice, I guess. But I ain't never been anything but a talker. Perhaps if I was different, I'd do what I planned. But I've always been kinder easy about things, and I was

fond of her and him, and I guess anybody'd say I was weak and foolish now. By and by he will go home with the rest of you. I ain't going to point him out. Maybe that girl that ran away with him wouldn't want me to do it. It might bring shame on her, too. I can't tell. Anyhow, I kinder like to think of her the way it used to be, and if I did her any harm now I wouldn't want to think of it any more," he says.

With that he put his hat on, kinder slow, and wrinkled his nose again and let them eye-glasses drop into place on his nose. Then all of a sudden, while the crowd was so still, he went back to his singsong voice.

"Gents," he says, "how's that for a story — told for a little fun and amusement about an average man?" he says. "And now," he says, dipping his hands into the basin of water, "if you'll give me your kind attention, I'll show you a marvellous new discovery. I'm about to wash my hands in this here basin, using ordinary water just as it runs out from your faucet, water spigot, or garden hose at home, gents. Move up here a little closer, and before I give my second demonstration of Smith's Twelve-Horse-Power Flake I'll offer a few more of the Suwanee Snake Salve, used by the court beauties of France for over a century, together with a genuine California diamond scarf-pin. This here salve removes blemishes of each and every kind. All you have to do is expose the surface of the skin, just like I do now by drawing back my sleeve, and take a little salve

on your fingers and rub it on the spot. So simple that a mere child can use it."

Right then I felt Father Ryan's hand grab my sleeve.

"What is it?" says I.

"Look at his arm," says the old man, kinder husky.

"There's a tattoo on it — a picture of a ship," he says, and pulled at my sleeve again. "He was the boy that went to jail."

And so we walks away.

Father Ryan and I went down toward the south end of Main Street, and it was a long time before he said anything. There was just the sound of our feet.

"Well," he says at last, "winter's coming fast," he says, "and though the trouble between the men and Harvey has driven a lot of them away, there'll be suffering here among them who is left," he says. "It will be hard on the girls — them who has no one to take care of them or homes to go back to," he says.

"So it will," I says. "But there ain't a great many of them."

"Like that Villet girl I once tried to reason with," he says. "Do you know, Jim," he says, "I heard there was some trouble about her. I heard she had left town."

"She did," I says, "and didn't take but few of her things with her, for, as you know, she was living at my house, and she must have been ashamed to face us for some reason or other," I says, looking at his face in the

light from one of the street-lamps. I wanted to see if he knew anything about the matter.

But he only cleared his throat, for the air was kinder sharp, and says, "Why, I'd forgotten. She was at your house for a while, wasn't she?" he says. "She's come back, I see," he says.

CHAPTER XXVI

"ANNE VILLET!" I says, roaring out the name, "come back!"

"What's the matter with you?" he says. "Certainly I seen her. I seen her yesterday. And to-night she was standing just outside the crowd we were in. She must be no better in health," he says. "She was there, and her face was the color of lemon sherbet," he says, "and her eyes was very wild, I thought, and she seemed sick and very weak," says he. "She looked like one of the dead that had come back to make trouble for the living," he says.

It was on my tongue then to say something that would have given him the whole story, but I shut my teeth on the words and swallowed 'em and says, "I'm surprised to hear it," I says. "And I think I'll leave you now, for I must be getting home," I says.

"You may be going home," he says, "but you act as if you was going because the house was on fire," he says. "Good night," he says, "anyhow."

I hadn't gone many steps before I felt one of them occasions had come for oaths, and I ripped out a few round, full-grown ones beneath my breath. I had

misjudged the distance. Father Ryan heard me, and he called to me.

"Come back a minute," he says.

"I'm sorry you heard them words," I says. "I was thinking evil and trying to expel it from my system," says I, with a grin.

But he was scowling and looked stern. "Jim," he says, very solemn, "I can't forbear to censure you," says he. "You may need that stuff sometime," he says, "and it's a shame to waste it now," and with that he laughed one of them laughs of his and says, "I guess I was never born to be a priest," he says. "Go on with you! And good night again," he says.

I hurried back to the house. "This time it's me that has the news," I kept saying to myself, and climbing Maple Street I took most of my breath and was puffing and blowing when I got to the door-step.

Annie must have heard my foot on the gravel, for she opened the door for me.

"Have you heard the news?" I says.

"Oh, Jim, dear!" she says, having the advantage of breath over me. "I don't want to hear any small gossip," she says. "I must tell you," she says, "Anne Villet is back in town."

"When did you hear it?" I says.

"To-night," says she. "And nothing would do for Katherine but to go out and look for her," she says.

"To bring her here?" I asks.

“Katherine would have it no other way,” says she. “We must have no scene, Jim,” she says, hanging up my coat.

But there was no chance for one. I remember how plain it appeared when the daughter came in with that other woman. Katherine was almost holding Anne up. She was thinner and whiter and I thought harder than ever. But she was weak, like a grape-vine when you take its trellis away. Katherine is strong, but she could hardly keep the poor thing from falling over. And my Annie ran to get the whiskey from the top shelf of the medicine closet.

Once or twice Anne Villet tried to speak, and Katherine whispered to me that if we didn’t take her upstairs and put her to bed, she might die. “I found her at Mrs. Riordan’s,” says she, “and she acts like some one in a trance,” says she.

And so we took her to a bed, and Annie and Katherine came down after they had undressed her and she had turned over to lie face downward on the pillow. And the three of us looked at each other. And maybe we wondered at life.

It couldn’t have been much after six o’clock that morning when I heard the Villet woman call Katherine. The day hadn’t any more than broke, and it was cold enough to make me hurry into my clothes and go down to build a fire. Annie and Katherine had come down, too, shivering around the stove before it had any more

warmth in it than you could imagine by just hearing the snapping of the wood and smelling the burning newspaper. And then we heard her call Katherine again, and we all went upstairs.

She had the same wild look in her eyes, and she was leaning up on one of her thin elbows. When she saw the three of us in the door, she says, with a rough laugh: "I must get up. I've got to go. Oh, you're all good to me," she says. "I couldn't think last night," she says. "But now I've got to go!"

"Go?" says Katherine, as if she would stop her. "Go where?"

"Go to him," says she. "Go and throw myself in the dirt in front of where he stands," she says, pulling at the blankets with her bony hands.

"To Robert Harvey?" asks my Annie, in a frightened voice.

"What! that young fool?" says the Villet girl. "No, to my husband," she says.

"Husband!" cries Katherine, "husband!"

"Yes," says Anne, with her mouth working. "You seen him," she says, turning to me. "Say so! Say you seen him! It weren't a dream. Say you seen him!"

"Who?" says I, being afraid of her.

"The professor!" she screams. "My God, it was him! Whoever would think the three of us would come together again? The Lord has played a trick on us," she says.

“And you was the woman!” I says.

“Yes,” she says. “What am I saying? It’s out now. Yes, that was me. And to hear him tell about the picket fence out there in Chicago — Tell me I ain’t crazy,” she says, holding out one hand to me. “You heard him? You saw him?”

But I only gave a yell. “Then it wasn’t Harvey?” I roars at her. “It was Carter Elinore?”

The ratty look came into her eyes again — the old suspicious look, and she turned it on me and then on Katherine and then on Annie.

“What’s that to you?” she says, looking at me again. “To-day I’ll be gone, whatever happens,” she says, “and you’ll never see me again,” says she, with her teeth shut. “It ain’t anything to you!” she says.

It was then Katherine went over to the bed and caught hold of the Villet woman’s trembling hand. “Listen,” she says, in a soft voice, and plucking at the neck of her dress as if it choked her. “Listen, Anne,” she says. “It’s everything to me.”

The other woman turned sort of slow and looked up at her. Maybe she read the whole thing in Katherine’s face, for all of a sudden she caught the girl’s dress and says: “It can’t be true. You mean that you and Bob Harvey —” Then she stopped and looked up at Katherine again, and Katherine nodded.

I seen a look of fright come into the Villet woman’s face. I’d never seen it before. I’d never seen her

frightened at anything. And then I seen her fall back on the bed and bury her face, and she says, "I wish I'd never been born," and she cried. And that was another thing I'd never seen her do.

When she got up on to her elbow again, she took Katherine's hand and pressed it against her cheek. "I never meant to do any harm to you," she says. "I never knew. You believe it, Katherine? I never knew," she says.

"Then tell me!" cries my girl. "Tell me! It wasn't him?"

"No," says Anne Villet. "It wasn't him. It was Carter Elmore."

And I've had to laugh about it since, for Katherine turned on her mother and me like a wild thing. "There!" she says. "I've told you all along it wasn't so!"

"Wait, Katherine," Anne says, and her voice was very tired; "I'll tell you," and she sat up in bed.

"But it was Bob you saw out the window that night."

"No!" I says. "Why didn't I think of it before? It was the Boss's son-in-law she saw," I says. "He had come up to find his wife," I says. "It was the night Carrie Pierson was going to run away," I says.

"Oh," says Anne Villet, "it is very simple," she says. "I had to have something — money or something. I was restless here. I couldn't stand it!" she says. And then a fit of coughing caught her, and she pressed her hand against her chest.

"Yes," she says, "I went down there to cause trouble. It was his wife who met me at the door. And then this other came out — the Boss's son. I guess he seen what I'd come for. He took me out under the trees on the lawn," she says. "I guess I talked pretty excited and straight to him, and he pointed back to the house and told me that the woman I'd seen was his sister, and that if I made trouble it would ruin her life," she says.

"Oh!" says Katherine, with a little cry like women make.

The Villet girl smiled then — a sort of a sour smile. "Well," says she, "I asked him what it was worth to have me go away, and I watched his face in the moonlight. And he said he'd do anything to protect his sister," she says, "and I told him it was money, — that was all, — money, — money or some trouble. He was young, and I knew I could frighten him."

"So he agreed?" says my Annie, with her eyes and mouth open.

"Yes," says the Villet woman. "He wanted me to wait a day. He was all excited. But I was afraid of a trick. I told him it would have to be a cash trade," she says, "that night. And he asked what people would think, and I told him he might have to take the blame some day for just such another as me, and the practice would do him good, and I laughed at him," she says.

I seen Katherine draw her hand away then and look

at Anne Villet the way I'd look at a rattlesnake, and then I seen her face change and I seen her put her hand back in the other woman's.

"That was all," says Anne Villet. "He was bungling—the way he went at it," she says, "but he got the money by telegraph, trying to keep the thing quiet. So I didn't care. He hadn't any wife, and I supposed that he would tell his father the secret and square himself," she says. "And may I be struck dead, Katherine, if I knew that I was doing harm to you," she says.

After a minute she looked up at my girl again and seen her thinking. "What's the matter?" she says. "Don't you believe me? Mr. Hands," she says, turning to me, "did anybody find a little picture I dropped when I left here?"

I remembered it in a second, and I went up the ladder into the attic and opened the bag she had left, and there was the picture looking up at me again. So I took it down and gave it to her and she gave it to Katherine. And my girl cried right out, "It's Elmore! It is! It is!"

"Turn it over," says Anne Villet, in her croaking voice.

So Katherine turned it over, and there was the words, "To Anne from C. E., April fifth," in a fine hand on the back.

And she looked at the front of it and at the back of it, and says to Anne, "Don't worry," the same as she wrote

it for us once on a card — and she went across the hall with never a word, and me and my Annie watching her, and went into her room and shut the door.

I guess it must have been an hour later that Anne Villet came down. I never thought anything of it when she kind of strolled out the door. I don't suppose I'd ever have known what had happened to her if I hadn't gone out to close the hay door in the loft of the barn. And just as I was going to pull it in I seen the question-mark — the question-mark on the wagon.

I hadn't thought of the perfesser. But there was his old white horse with his ears still hanging down, dragging the red wagon up the hill. And I seen Anne Villet walk out from the patch of bushes halfway up to the top. She must have been on the watch for him — waiting.

I just barely heard his voice when he said "Whoa" to the old horse, and the creak of the wheels stopped. The two of 'em was a long way off. They looked like a man and woman talking about the price of a dozen eggs. But finally he moved over, and she climbed up and sat down beside him just like somebody who has been given a lift on a butcher cart.

And then I seen her and the perfesser for the last time. He pushed down the big cotton umbrella and stood up on the seat, with the sun shining on his fake eye-glasses, until the outfit had dropped outer sight over the ridge — looking back at the town.

Katherine came down from her room long after her

breakfast was cold on the table and after little Michael and John had gone to school. Her mother had said it was best to leave the girl alone, and that she would keep the coffee, and tell her, after she had had some food and a hot cup, how Anne Villet had gone away.

When I came in, Katherine looked up at me, and her eyes were all alive.

"We're going on a walk together," she says to me.

"Where?" says I.

"To the Boss's house," she says. "I have a few things to tell him," she says, "and I want my father with me," she says, putting her hand on mine. It was as warm as the bowl of my pipe.

"No!" says I, very firm. "If the Boss wants anything from us, let him come here — to my house — and ask for it," I says. "It's different now," I says. "We can be aristocratic with him," I says.

A funny little smile came into her face, and I seen them two corners of her pretty mouth twitch. "Oh, let's be nice to him," says she, pulling at my coat. "It's only the real aristocrats that can afford not to act so," she says.

"Well," says I, "there's no use arguing with you," I says. "I'll go up and change my clothes," I says.

"Oh, no," she says. "Wear what you have. There is no need of being particular," she says, laughing. So I put on my hat and we walked down to Main Street and across the Common.

We met him, as luck would have it, on the driveway, and you could tell by the look that came into his face that he knew she had some real thing to tell him, even before she said so. I can remember now how the two of them walked back and forth under them horse-chestnut trees that had shed all the leaves.

It had grown very cold, and the sky was clouded over, and I had to stamp my feet to keep them warm. And I watched my girl with her clear eyes and soft skin and the old man with his baggy trousers and gray hair. After a while I seen him stop and wave his hand as if he weren't satisfied, and then I seen her hand him the little picture with the words on the back of it.

When that happened, he went up to one of the trees and begun picking off pieces of bark, and then he looked up and down the trunk as if he was trying to count up the board feet in it. And then he took off his hat and ran his fingers through his hair, and after a minute he said, so I could hear him, "By George! I'll go and telegraph for my boy!"

He was walking toward me then, and I saw him turn and look at the girl beside him. After a while he spoke again.

"Miss Hands," he said, "I guess — I rather guess, my boy and I owe you a great deal. You have put him back in his place. You have preserved his friends and his reputation for him — and some of his self-respect, maybe. You have restored him to me," he

says, speaking like a man who forgets that anybody is listening to him. "You have taught us something of loyalty — and a hell of a lot about womanhood."

And then it was that Katherine gave a little laugh, "Oh, thank you," she says. "You are very kind," she says.

"Well," says he, "come to think of it, that's a pretty good boy!"

"It's true!" says Katherine. "Of course," she says, "I come from very simple people," she says, with her eyes dancing, "but I've thought so for a long time," she says. And she bowed to him and came to me, leaving him there following her with his eyes, and I seen a funny kind of smile slide down over his face.

CHAPTER XXVII

THAT was on Tuesday. On Wednesday there was a meeting of the labor-union that everybody will remember. There wasn't so much talking, but everybody looked a heap. Dave Kennedy read a letter from the central union saying how they'd found it impossible to add anything to our strike fund, but how we ought to stick it out and have courage, and another from the owner of Masonic Hall, saying how the rent due from our union for the use of the hall hadn't been paid. We took a vote, and you could tell how bull-dog the men felt because two hundred of 'em were for holding out against the Boss, when every man of 'em had already been up against being busted and hungry.

And then Bill Gaylor came in, looking red and out of breath. Seems to me I can see him now as he stood there in the door, and says in a kind of dull voice, but so's everybody could hear, "The factory's for sale!"

Dave caught the edges of the table. "What?" says he.

"The factory's for sale," says Bill, pushing his way up through the men — some of 'em had jumped up and were standing, and some of 'em had kind of slumped back on the settees — "there's a big white sign on the side next the railroad!"

A good many of us pushed each other for a place at the back windows, where you get could a look at the tracks and the covered bridge, and I tell you I never felt so curious as when I seen that sign smashing me between the eyes. It looked like the finish of my little home and the whole business, and I felt like a feller that gets thrown overboard in the middle of the ocean, and has his woman and kids thrown overboard, too. You could tell by the look of the others that it weren't any different with them.

"Gentlemen," says Dave, "we are up against the real thing now. Of course we don't know what the Boss is going to do, but I suggest that we send a committee to him to find out. Then if we — we are up against the finish of this fight now — if we have to compromise —"

At that Bill Gaynor came up like the fur on a mad cat's tail. "Compromise nothing!" he yells, his eyes red with liquor or fever or something. "I'll not compromise! We can beat him out if we have to cut our own throats to do it. We can burn the factory!"

A feller next to me, whose wife was sick, kind of tightened his hands and leaned forward, looking into the air, and says, "Yes," and two or three others yelled, "You're right!" but the rest of us jumped up, yelling, "No, no, none of that!" and three of us were appointed to go and see the Boss and report that evening. I was one of 'em.

We went straight up there and rang the bell on the big

front door, and the Boss's pretty daughter opened it. "Tell him there are three of his hands that want to see him, miss," says I.

"Why," says she, "he told me to say that he can't see the use of talk, since you have your minds made up."

I caught sight of two trunks in the hall that looked as if they was ready to go somewhere, and it was a jar — like the sign on the factory!

"Please, miss, tell him we want to see him — bad," says Henderson, who stood back of me.

"Step in," says she; "he's in there in the library."

The Boss was sitting in an arm-chair reading a book, and he looks up and smiles. "Howdy do, Jim? Howdy do, Joe?" and then he scowls and says, "I thought I'd never be bothered about this factory business any more."

"Have you shut it down for good?" says I.

"Yes," says he, kinder thoughtful; "the business was a habit with me, I guess, and I don't know but what it was a poor habit. I got so into the habit of running that business that when you fellers forced me to quit I felt for a few days like an old smoker who has run out of tobacco on a desert island. I'd thought of quitting long ago, but habit kept me going. But that's all over now — all the worry and the care and fret and fuss. The load is off my mind now!"

Well, you'd be surprised to see the way Henderson's jaw dropped till his under lip looked like a hammock, and I guess Joe and I had the pop eyes.

“Yes,” says the Boss, motioning for us to sit down in a kind of careless way. “There’s been a clover patch waiting for me, and I never saw it till a week ago. I’ve run this factory now for a good many years, and I’ve got a nice roly-poly little income, so what’s the use of my slaving away in this muddy little one-horse town till I slam the door of this life behind me? I haven’t much money to leave to my boy, and I consider that’s lucky for him; and my youngest daughter will probably marry a man who is smart enough always to make it comfortable for her. So now I’ve come to a breathing spell. I’m going to Europe for a good rest, and when I get back I’m going to settle down in the city where I can rub elbows with something else besides a lot of jobbers, buyers, and supply salesmen.”

The Boss didn’t seem to be talking to us at all, but just to himself, but I was thinking some, and everything looked pretty black.

“What’ll become of the men?” says I, like that. “For God’s sake, what’ll we do — we that has got homes here and kids? What’ll happen to this town?”

“I’d thought of that,” says the Boss, “and you can believe me or not, I’m mighty sorry for the men. An industry like that factory isn’t run for the man that owns it — altogether. It’s run for the laborers, too, and the town, and, in fact, if it’s a good industry, it’s run for the good of the whole country. Yes, I’ve realized that all along. But I’m selfish now. I’m out for a soft snap —”

Henderson looked kind of scared, but he stopped twirling his hat and got up out of his chair.

"Excuse me," says he, "and don't understand that there are many of us feel any sympathy with it, but there are a few hot-headed ones who have suffered more than the rest of us who say if you don't do something they'll burn the factory."

The Boss looked up, kind of squinting, and then he brought his hand down on his knee with a big slap.

"Good!" says he. "I don't know whether the insurance would cover that case or not, but I don't care — I'd be glad to have the old factory out of the way. It's a darned old monument to every trouble and worry I ever had, and if it was wiped away I'd never have any temptation to come back to it!"

To hear the Boss talk that way made me feel sicker and sicker, and I could see my finish just as plain as I can see you. I was looking down on the floor, and I can remember the pattern on that carpet just as well as I can remember the color of the paint on my father's house, and when I looked up the Boss had his keen blue eyes on me.

He shook his head: "Poor fellers, poor fellers," says he to himself, and then, all of a sudden, he jumped up straight. "Say, Jim," says he, "when does your labor-union have its next meeting?"

"To-night," says I.

"Jim," says he, "you fellers know me. You know I tell the truth from one to ten, and A to Z. And what

I've said to you to-day is true. You go back and tell 'em what I said, and tell 'em that if they want, I'll speak to 'em to-night. Tell 'em that!"

"Yes, sir," says I.

"Thanks," Henderson says, having no idea what he was thanking for, and he and Joe and I went out.

"It is all over but the shouting, I guess," says Joe, in the driveway. But I was too sore and hard-pressed to pass words with him.

A good many of the men knew how we came out with the Boss before the meeting that night, and I guess a lot of 'em were figuring just how hard it would hit 'em to pull up and get out of town and look for a job. A good many of 'em, like me, had grown pretty deep roots here, and it seemed as if there'd be a good deal of wilting before we could get set into a new flower-bed.

It made your feet heavy to think about it, and you'd see many a husky-looking feller who would scuffle along without the heart to lift his shoes off the ground. Besides, it had clouded up to snow, and everything was dismal — awful dismal! It didn't make much difference that the papers said we'd forced the Boss into a corner — we'd got it! That's what had happened to us!

There was a sorry-looking gang that came to the meeting, but it looked like the last round, and pretty near everybody came, to be in at the wind-up! We'd begun together, and I guess the men felt as if we

might as well end up together. And besides, there was a good deal of curiosity to know what the Boss would say if he got the chance.

Dave Kennedy told 'em all what I had reported, and asked for a show of hands to see if the union wanted to send for the old man. You oughter seen the hands come up — just like a field of wheat; even the fellers who looked soggy with liquor stuck up their fists. Dave grinned kinder sour and says, “Henderson — you’re near the door — the Boss is downstairs in the drug store.”

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was a sight to see that hall crowded full of men, with their faces kinder glued on the doorway, and never making hardly the sound of a breath when the Boss came in and walked through 'em up to the table, but just following him with their eyes.

The Boss stood up there, straight and stiff, with his overcoat on, and little specks of snow that hadn't melted all over it, and sort of give a sigh which sounded like a shout, the hall was so still.

“When I built my factory in this town,” says he slowly, and I can remember every word, he spoke so slow, “I did it because living was cheaper here than in other places where they are making my class of goods, and because, for that reason, it would be fair to pay lower wages than they pay farther down the State. It was my policy to make a lot of goods on small profits, and never shut down except on Sundays. It worked. It made me as much money as I ever will want to spend, it built up this town, it gave what I believed was good, fair wages and employment to over three hundred men; it sent out an honest lot of goods. That's what goes to show that an industry is a good thing for the man who owns it, the men who work in it, the town where it is run, and the people who buy its product — ”

He sorter stopped and listened as if he expected somebody to call him a liar.

“Now, you can believe it or not,” says he, “but if I paid higher wages to-day, it would knock out the whole foundation of the industry. Instead of being a blessing to this town and this country, it would be a mighty bad thing. It would cut my share of the profits way down below what I ought to get for the skill I put into the business; it would tempt me to make a dishonest line of goods; it would tend to raise the wages of the factories down the State, and if they raised their wages, they’d have to run on a little fine strip of profit that would break and make ’em fail in hard times; it would drive men of brains, who expect to have their brains pay dividends, out of the business. That’s what it would do.”

Some of the men shifted their feet, and a good many were leaning forward to listen, and the Boss went on: “There were two things that made me keep on with this factory after it had made me enough money so’s I could always have a nice comfortable income — one thing was the habit of making money, and it’s a good deal stronger habit than liquor, and I’m just as fond of money as anybody; and the other was a kind of sneaking feeling that it was my duty to keep on. I’ve been thinking of it since I stopped, and I seen now that as long as an industry is a good one, there are a dozen reasons, and unselfish reasons, too, why it shouldn’t ever be allowed to stop. If I had stopped on my own account,

I would have deserved to be hanged. Just think what misery it would have caused to the men who worked for me, and who had settled with families in this town!"

Some of the men muttered, and one feller in the back of the hall, said, "You've stopped, haven't you?"

"No!" yells the Boss, so everybody jumped. "You stopped! You stopped — and that's why I'm going to have a soft snap, that's why I'm going to Europe, and wash my hands of this," says he. "If it hadn't been for you, I would have stopped long ago. If you would have given me my fair profit and taken yours, we'd been running to-day; and if we were running, it would be because you wanted to run, not because I wanted to run! You're the ones who stopped!"

"No!" yells several of the men, standing up. "We want to run," and then everybody scrambles up between the settees, yelling: "Yes! Yes! We want to run!" and the feller next to me — a great big strapping six-feet-four — bellows out, "The old way! the old way!" and tears ran down his cheeks.

"Oh, you want to run? In the old way? With the old wages?" cries the Boss, with a smile looking like the sunshine on a patch of meadow.

"With the Old Boss — the Old Boss!" shouts Dave, and every man of 'em takes up the yell, and hands was stuck up in the air with fingers stretching. And then, all of a sudden, it got so quiet you'd think you were alone there, and the Boss looks around with his eyes kinder

glistening like I never seen 'em before, and he says, talking kinder as if he'd just run a mile: "No more strikes — we don't need 'em when we can — well, we don't need 'em. The factory will start running Monday."

At those words every man there sorter dropped his shoulders with the joy of it, and turned his head down a mite.

"And," says the Boss, "any man that has a family, or anybody that's sick, just come to me, will you? We've got to patch up this hole that has been punched in us."

The men started to yell out what they had bottled up in the way of feelings for the last week, and the Boss grabbed his hat off the table and started for the door. Then all of a sudden he stopped. The fire-bell was booming out in the tower of the Opera House next door, and you could hear people hollering along the street outside.

"It's the factory!" yells a feller, and we could see the red glow out the back windows of the hall. Somebody near the door cries out, "The storage shed is what's going!" and the Boss jumps up on a chair. "Jim!" he yells, "pick out seven men to help get the apparatus down there; the rest of you men come with me."

I'll not quickly forget that night. Most anybody in town is always ready to tell about it. It was raining, and freezing where it dropped, and except for the red of the blaze it was so dark that a white cat looked black. Among the three hundred of us that fought the fire back

from the factory it would surprise you how many got jambed hands and burnt ears and cuts on the head. See that middle finger? That was that night. But we were fighting for the factory, and I guess every man felt it was *his* factory; and my Annie and Katherine and the Boss's daughter and a lot of the women-folks come down with cans and bottles of hot coffee. The women who stayed at home, I guess, were praying when the blaze gave one of them devilish leaps and roars, but the men would yell back at it and fight it again right up to the place where a feller could smell his own hair singeing!

It was three o'clock before we had saved the main building, and I crawled home up over the hill, and my Annie met me at the door with a lamp and put her arms around my neck and says, "My boy, my boy," like she hadn't said since a long time before we got gray hairs, and little Michael came in and tried to climb up my leg, and Katherine came and knocked off a little red cinder that was still eating its way into my coat.

"By the way, Katherine," I says, hardly able to speak, I was so hoarse, "he is back."

"Here in town?" she cries out.

"Yes," I says, "he was the feller you saw on the roof — the feller that went up and opened the valve on the second water-tank," I says. "Everybody was asking. It was young Harvey," I says.

She turned a bit white. "Is he safe?" she says.

“I come from very simple people,” says I, mocking her, “but I couldn’t see anything the matter with him,” I says, laughing. And yet my head was swimming with being tired out.

And that night two clean sheets was the best thing I ever felt.

CHAPTER XXIX

I SUPPOSE when the boys are away at school and Katherine isn't with us, and evening has come and I have read my paper and the wife's eyes is smarting from too much sewing, and maybe the wind of night is singing outside, that my Annie and I will never get tired of speaking of that next day.

I well remember of how black and charred the factory looked from the front window against the white of that night's snowfall on the hills. Then I went back to bed, and they didn't wake me at all at the ordinary time, and I slept until eleven o'clock, and when I got up it seemed as if I'd never seen so much sunlight before. It was melting the snow away, and birds was picking in the bare places on the road, and there was a warm and pleasant smell inside the house.

When I went downstairs I found that little Michael, and John with his books and slate, had come home from school, and Katherine had put on a new dress she'd been making, and Annie was keeping an eye on something on the kitchen stove.

I felt like a king of some big place, though every muscle in my body was sore. "Come here," I says, "every one of you," I says. "Sit here at the table," I says,

"and see your husband and old man eat his breakfast at noon," I says. "Because this is a sight you may never have the chance to see again," I says.

"You're leading the life of an Italian duke," says my Annie, with a laugh.

"It pains me to hear you say so," I says, "with a dish of oatmeal as dry as this before me," I says, "and the coal-bill not paid," says I. "You'd better let me enter as an American," I says.

"With a dash of Irish," says Katherine, filling my pipe for me.

But the breakfast was never finished. There came a knock on the door. "It's two men," says Michael, running back to tell us. And when Annie opened the door there was the Old Boss and his boy.

"We didn't ask to see the whole family," says the old man, patting little John on the cheek. "We told you we were calling on Miss Hands," he says, "on a matter of business," says he.

Perhaps he would have said more, but Katherine came into the room and looked around. "Bob!" she says, "Bob!"

But the young feller only straightened up his big frame and bit his lip and made a move with his hand toward his father. Katherine looked at him a minute, and he looked at the floor very indifferent, and I seen the tears come into her eyes.

"We have a matter to settle with you, Miss Hands,"

says the Old Boss. "Perhaps it is better for me to speak of this than my son," he says. "I'll try to be brief," he says.

I seen the scared look on Annie's face, and I felt then as if another trouble, the biggest of all, was coming to us.

"Run along, John, and take your brother out to play," I says. "And now let us sit down," says I.

To this day I can see Katherine on that sofa. What a figure she had! And there she sat alone by herself with her arms by her side, and her dress moving with the length of breaths she was taking.

"Katherine," says the Old Boss, "perhaps I could tell you this better if we were alone. I used to think it was an advantage years ago not to have anybody around on an occasion like this," he says, and then he stopped and looked around at the boy. "It's no use, Bob," he said, "I'm no good at this," he says, and looked sheepish.

But just the same he moved his chair around where he could face her.

"Katherine," he says again, "you once told me that when my boy wanted you, I was to come and ask for you," he says. "Well," he says, "here I am. Don't speak!" he says. "Wait."

With that he looked at her a moment and his face got serious and he ran his fingers through his gray hair till it was all in a tangle.

"Here I am," he says again. "I've come to ask you to love my son a little. He doesn't want any other

woman. He wants you. Probably he always will," he says. "If I was in his place I would be almost afraid to ask for you," he says, "for as much as I respect him, I'm not sure he has enough to give you," he says. "Of course with me it's a little different," he says. "I will tell you straight that I wish I could make you love me a little the way you must love your own father. I'm willing to try. I'll do what I can. But you have said that I must speak for him, too," he says. "So here I am," he says, and looked at the floor. "My boy wants you to be his wife," he says, so low you could hardly hear him. "He wants you to be the mother of his children."

Katherine shut her eyes. I seen her. I seen them long lashes. And then she opened them again and stood up and looked at the old man and then at Bob, who was holding on to the chair arms so hard they cracked. Her voice was clear, too — clear and strong.

"I will be his wife," she says.

"Katherine!" says the boy, and jumped up.

"There!" says the Old Boss over his shoulder to his son. "You see all your worry was for nothing." And he turned back to her then. "Will you let the old man kiss you?" he says.

"Why, yes," says my girl, with the color coming up to the surface of her skin. "Only nobody has ever asked me before," she says, like a little girl, "and I'd rather Bob would have the first," she says.

I looked up then at my Annie. And our eyes met. And I knew then that she and I both saw as clear as day everything that was to be. I think we even saw the youngster that came to be our grandson, just as if he was already living. And though the world will never hear of us, I guess we knew that she and I had seen and felt and loved about all there was to see and feel and love in life.

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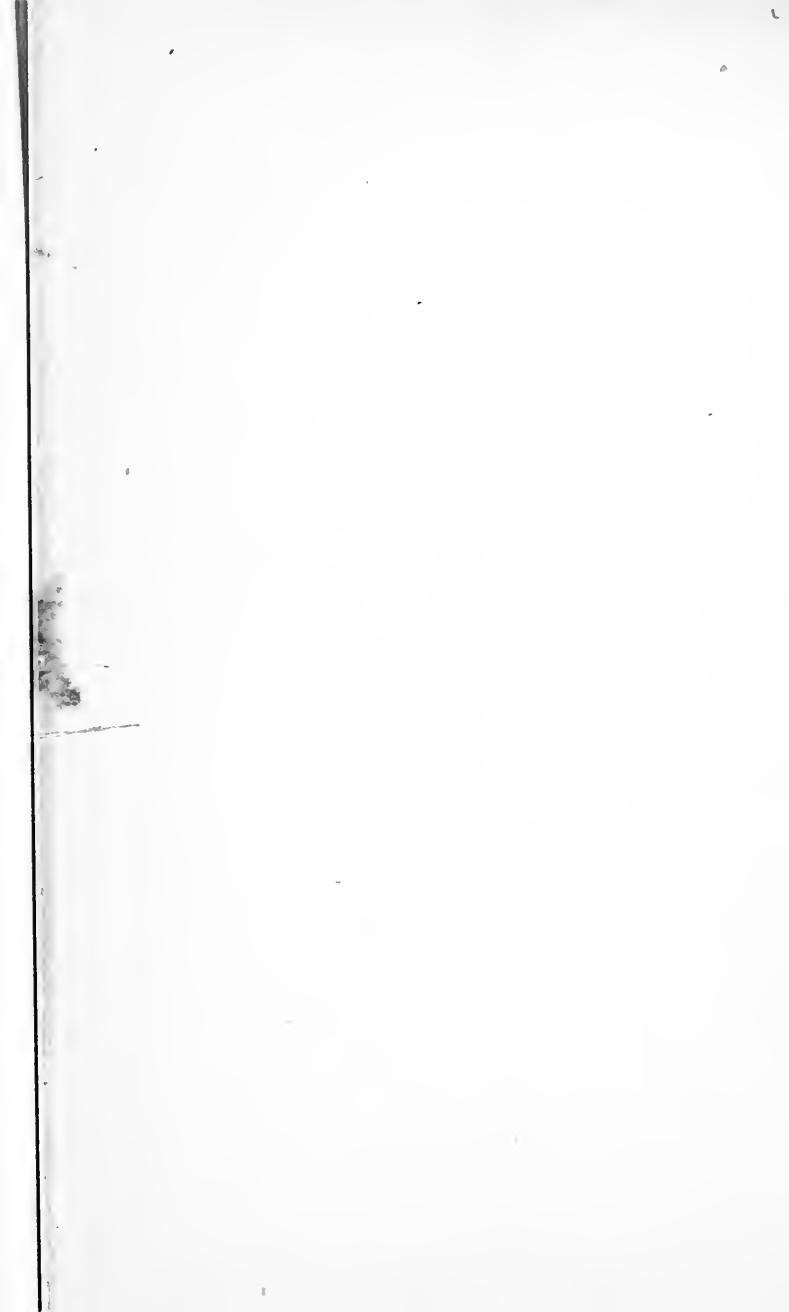














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